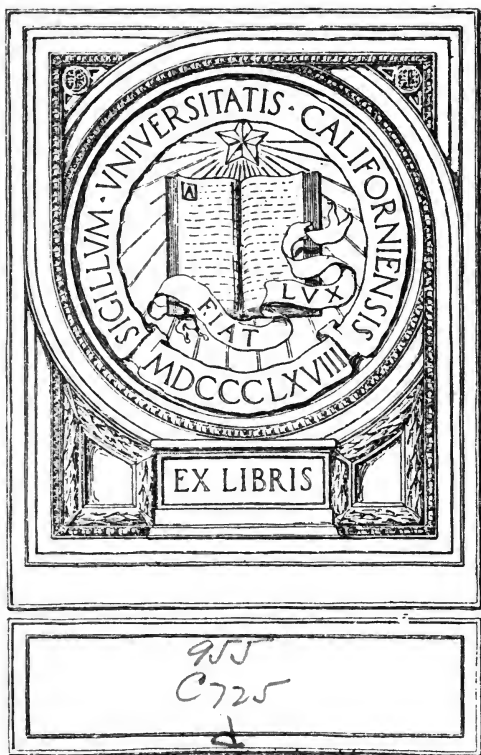


"THE DEBATABLE LAND"



A Story of Modern
American Life ~ ~

50



THE FOLLOWING IS A LIST OF TWELVE
AMERICAN NOVELS PUBLISHED BY
HARPER & BROTHERS DURING 1901, WRITTEN
FOR THE MOST PART BY NEW AMERICAN
WRITERS, AND DEALING WITH DIFFERENT
PHASES OF CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN LIFE.

"EASTOVER COURT HOUSE." By HENRY
BURNHAM BOONE and KENNETH BROWN.

"THE SENTIMENTALISTS." By ARTHUR
STANWOOD PIER.

"MARTIN BROOK." By MORGAN BATES.

"A VICTIM OF CIRCUMSTANCES." By
GERALDINE ANTHONY.

"DAYS LIKE THESE." By EDWARD W.
TOWNSEND.

"WESTERFELT." By WILL N. HARBEN.

"THE MANAGER OF THE B & A." By
VAUGHAN KESTER.

"THE SUPREME SURRENDER." By
A. MAURICE LOW.

"THE STRENGTH OF THE HILLS."
By FLORENCE WILKINSON.

"LET NOT MAN PUT ASUNDER." By
BASIL KING.

"WHEN LOVE IS YOUNG." By ROY
ROLFE GILSON.

"THE DEBATABLE LAND." By ARTHUR
COLTON.

"THE DEBATABLE LAND"

A Novel

By
Arthur Colton
"



New York and London
Harper & Brothers Publishers
1901

Copyright, 1901, by HARPER & BROTHERS.

All rights reserved.

TO
R. H. LOINES

“For the Debatable Land, being that portion of ground which, lying between two countries, belongeth to neither, does of all regions abound most in disturbance, adventures, even legends, and, as men say, in warlocks and witches. Thus the astute German, Hermantius, significantly calleth the region of youth a debatable land, and seeketh to illustrate time by space.”
—*The Dictionary of Devices.*

Contents

PART I

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. <i>"Hinter die Kirche blühe die blaue Blume der Zufriedenheit"</i>	3
II. <i>Of Thaddeus Bourn and his Purposes</i> . .	11
III. <i>Of Morgan Map and his Purposes</i>	24
IV. <i>In which Thaddeus uses the term "Moral Justification"</i>	32
V. <i>Introducing Hamilton and Saint Mary's Organ</i>	41
VI. <i>Introducing Gard Windham and the Broth- erhood of Consolation</i>	56
VII. <i>Introducing Moselle and Mavering</i>	71
VIII. <i>Of Mrs. Mavering, and of the Philosophy of the Individual</i>	85
IX. <i>Of Estates in Happiness</i>	99
X. <i>Of Spring in Hamilton—Of Thaddeus's Opportunity to be Candid</i>	118
XI. <i>The Whirlpool—Mr. Paulus's Reminis- cences of Women</i>	135

PART II

XII. <i>Antietam</i>	149
XIII. <i>In which Appears a General of Division, and one of "the Brethren"</i>	164

Contents

CHAPTER		PAGE
XIV.	<i>In which Mavering Concludes that Cavalry Officers as a Class are Eccentric and Deep</i>	181
XV.	<i>Treats of the Distribution of Tracts in the Valley of the Shenandoah</i>	192
XVI.	<i>Which Discloses one Daddy Joe, and Disposes of an Evangelist</i>	207
XVII.	<i>On the Question of the Exact Location of the Divinity which is Ultimately Called Worth While</i>	223
XVIII.	<i>In which there is Discovered a Compunction</i>	235
XIX.	<i>In which Windham Drops Out of the Fight —and Mavering Remarks on Human Adaptability</i>	253
XX.	<i>Treats of Further Incidents in the House with the White Door</i>	264
XXI.	<i>In which We Go Down the River and Return</i>	274
XXII.	<i>Of Mavering, who Disappears — Of the Gray Poet—Of Morgan, Who Appears Once More</i>	286
XXIII.	<i>The End</i>	307

Part 1



“The Debatable Land”

Chapter I

“Hinter die Kirche blühe die blaue Blume der Zufriedenheit.”—MEISTER ECKHART.

WIDOW BOURN'S house stood behind the church, and blue flowers grew contentedly on the sloping green, shy fancies of a maiden spring that never lasted out a summer's experience. New England churches have not that air of nestling comfort which seemed to Meister Eckhart so sweet a symbol. They crown the hills with square frames and sharpened steeples, churches militant, plate-mailed in clapboards, with weather-vane aimed defiantly into the wind. Their doors are closed, their windows shuttered against all days of the week saving one. But Widow Bourn found the proximity comfortable. The church militant faced the issues of the spirit for her, and subdued them. She plodded through her Bible, drawing contentment from texts

“The Debatable Land”

that meant no such matter, seeing in the ecclesiast's despondency only reflections connected here and there with sermons. "It is a pleasant thing to stand on the shore when other people are in the floods," the melancholy Roman poet remarked, meaning that it *would be*, because it was something his ever-journeying spirit in the waste seas of thought rendered impracticable for himself.

A gate opened from the widow's garden on the sloping green. Heavy-scented lilacs, purple and white, hung over it, and followed the fence at fragrant intervals. Lilacs crowded along the garden walls, pushed against green pillars of the porch and drooped luxurious heads at the windows. Lilacs are tropical and anti-puritan; they belong with the chuckle of lutes over low casements, and liquid voices speaking a vowelled tongue. Widow Bourn was pleasant-tempered, placid, possessed of a stillness, a certain dignity, and a frame not overpadded, but comfortable.

The Bourns were early settlers in Hagar. The settlers were still feeling their way in the wilderness beyond the Connecticut, sensible farmers who bargained for whole mountain ranges and valleys of the magnificent savage,

“The Debatable Land”

and recorded the transaction in minutes of the town-meeting. The magnificent savage commonly declared that his heart was great; he would sell the lands from the crooked lake to the joining of swift rivers to his white brothers, who marked the boundaries inferred from the sachem's oratory, and omitted to comment on the humor of it in minutes of the town-meeting. When the first Simon Bourn piled hewn beams for his cabin and ran his plough around stumps of trees that had furnished the beams there were few cabins in the neighborhood, and the town-meeting was held fifteen miles away. The last Simon Bourn ran his plough along the same hill-side, not dodging the same stumps, but the hill-side still drew up stones out of its inner perversity to check his plough. He found the slope of his life, like the slope of his ancestral fields, unfertile, shallow-soiled. The five generations of Bourns had accumulated and transmitted this opinion of their lives and hilly fields, that on the whole they were not justified.

Simon died in the early fifties and was buried in Hagar's hemlocked graveyard. Oddly enough, he seemed to regret it. Widow Bourn associated herself with this regret, but regret

“The Debatable Land”

has commonly an element of interrupted possibilities in it, and these must have lain the rather in Nellie, a yellow-headed, long-limbed, swift-footed maiden whose level gray eyes had in them a certain challenge and accusation, and whose years were ten.

“Don’t let Nellie forget me,” he said, and the graver carved on his tombstone, “Remember Me.” Simon perhaps intended it only for Nellie, but that did not prevent its forcing the passer to “remember” him, who never knew him and did not care about it. “Simon Bourn—Born——, Died——. Remember,” in raised letters on a white tombstone, stared out of the green gloom of the hemlocks. So the Elder Hamlet desired, “Remember Me.” “Remember thee, poor ghost?” Why remember? Go your ways, Simon Bourn, and trouble us not. It might have struck the public as egotistic, which was only a pathetic impulse pointing to Nellie, if the public had not been in the habit of accepting epitaphs of all kinds with a tolerance born of experience.

One could understand the exception Simon made in favor of Helen from his opinion and feeling about the world he left—that it was not on the whole justified—could understand

“The Debatable Land”

it in this way, that there was something in her young gravity and impetuous faith which seemed to isolate whatever she looked at. To be considered and remembered by her seemed important. It lifted one out of triviality. In Hagar she was a pronounced, a separate person. Hagar itself was compact of varieties, but Helen was intense in conception and direct in action to surprise Hagar. She ran away with Morgan Map to the Hamilton County Fair, and came back in the gray dawn, white-lipped with weariness. A neighbor or two had sat up with Widow Bourn to prevent her worrying. It was a gratifying success. The widow slept by the fire. Morgan was eighteen then, but the Maps were somewhat out of the reach of Hagar's opinion. She smote Mr. Paulus with a paint-brush across the face for interfering with her painting designs on cows and cats. They were not his cows and cats. That question in ethics threw Hagar into excited division, and it was not remembered whose cows and cats they were. She was sent to Miss Savage's School in Wimberton; muttering rumors of her crossed the Cattle Ridge. At sixteen she was thrown by one of the Sanderson horses, a red-eyed, ugly breed of racers;

“The Debatable Land”

and Joe Sanderson, then aged nine, ran at the horse and shot a barbed arrow into its hide, out of his bitter wrath and love of Nellie; and Nellie lay a twelvemonth and more on her back to cure her spine. These are but instances of enterprise. Whatever stood the challenge or test of worth and reality in her eyes was apt to be a cause of sudden valor or unreckoned devotion.

The accident was in 1858, the year after Squire Map's wife died, whose name was once Edith Lorn. There was a great funeral in Hagar, and carriages from down the Wyantenaug Valley as far as Hamilton. There was an explosion then, too, in the Map family regarding property. Gerald and Morgan were supposed to have announced their independence on the strength of their majority and inheritance. The squire took to himself a grudge against the world where sons are unfilial, friends betray, and love falls from negation to negation, and began that lonely life which lasted twenty years, shut in and brooding in the square house on the hill half a mile out on the Cattle Ridge road. Gerald Map came no more to Hagar, but Morgan was seen at times. He rode up from Hamilton the day

“The Debatable Land”

after Helen's fall, talked with the doctor, went up-stairs and kissed her cheek, and departed, silent to Widow Bourn's murmured remonstrance, “He shouldn't do that!”

Helen said: “Oh, that's all right,” indifferently, and Widow Bourn fell to extracting comfort from the situation. If a honey-bee extracts anything from anywhere, it is honey; she may not extract anything. There was a comfort in knowing where Helen was the day long; not that the widow's comfort had ever been seriously long disturbed, but Helen quiescent was more comfortable than Helen active, in process of silent loading or sudden discharge. One could consider her clothes at leisure, not in heated endeavor to have one dress for Sunday without a lateral or perpendicular rip. Everything in the balm of the widow's temperament took the soft flow of slow waters, as Simon's plaintive discontent had long before to her ears come to resemble Ecclesiastes. Helen was more difficult to adapt herself to, because Helen grew and changed. Now, the growth and change seemed for the time to have ceased. She was no less mysterious; but a mystery which is constant and presents the same inscrutable face, and not always another and

“The Debatable Land”

another, is more comfortable. Helen's life, after cataracts and restless seeking, seemed to have flowed into a dark pool, and lay there reflecting clouds, patches of stars, and the edges of dim forests.

The similitudes of young maidens and varied flowers, the happy possibilities in that comparison, were discovered of earliest poets. Out of the best of intentions there has come to us so far only the conviction that Helen did not resemble the blue violets growing behind the church in Hagar. As for Simon's epitaph, it outlasts the story and is still to be read. One may lean over the wall of the cemetery, say, at twilight, when the shadow of Windless Mountain is wide over Hagar, and read it to-day, note its stiff insistence, and suit one's self with reflections on man and nature and the purport of things. An issue will be observed to lie between Simon's epitaph and the solemn, fading mountain, an issue distinct and inclusive.

Chapter II

Of Thaddeus Bourn and his Purposes

THERE was given to the Bourns, then, of old, natures sloping to the Northern side, or they had taken that tendency from experience. Thaddeus Bourn, that elder brother of Simon, who left Hagar so long ago as when Quincy Adams was President, and became a civil flower of society in the city of Hamilton, was a spontaneous variation or reaction from the type. One heard that he had made a fortune airily, and lost it. He surely married another, lost part of that, and his wife of a year or two, who died and surprised him into regretting her with some sincerity. He became an official of the Hamilton County Bank, and floated on in middle life, buoyant, carrying an aroma of old fashions, a flower in his button-hole, a tall hat, a silver-headed cane. His eyes had wrinkles about them, his cheeks were thin, his foot light. All these were evident elements in the total of Thaddeus, but the total

“The Debatable Land”

itself was not a sum, but a harmony. To keep the seamy side of life turned down, and its sheen always in the sun, not only was Thaddeus's practice and theory, but he belonged to a distinct school in the practice of the art, which might be called the pseudo-classic.

He sat by Helen's bed half a day, and talked to her as to a grown lady, and was gracious and fluent. He brought the best flowers of his worldliness, and jingled all his silver bells to please her.

“Not a finer pair of eyes in Hamilton!” he said to the widow. “Positively she must not have a crick in her back. On my word, impossible.”

“We are taught to submit,” said the widow, perhaps placidly, at any rate patiently. Thaddeus mounted the stairs with a wrinkled smile.

“Sheep! That woman is a sheep! Helen, my dear, your back will be as straight as my cane, I give you my word.”

Nellie's lean hands, on the coverlet, and face, with its bacchante spread of hair above her head on the pillow, were losing their brown tan in the passage of slow weeks. The delicate creeping pallor and helplessness beckoned

“The Debatable Land”

Thaddeus to something tender, but he took council with wisdom.

“Uncle Tad,” she said, “why do you about always feel good?”

“Well, well, I haven’t cracked my spine. Never cracked anything but my heart and reputation—a—both of them like old varnish, on my word. Very good, varnish them again. I have”—Thaddeus used his gold eye-glasses gracefully to punctuate, emphasize, distinguish, for illustration, for ornament—“I have the opinion that to feel agreeable and to be agreeable are two habits that one cultivates like a garden. The first is a vegetable, the second a flower. You see? Exactly. In point of fact they are the fruit and flower of the same plant. A—a figure of speech, Nellie. If you kindly wouldn’t look at me like the Angel of Judgment. A—look at the ceiling. Thank you.”

Thaddeus delicately unfolded his theory of the conduct of life, Nellie’s grave eyes now and then confusing him with mute challenge.

To his experience, then, there were two classes of people—those who were more or less pleased with the world, and those who more or less were not. Both personally and morally it was

“The Debatable Land”

better to be in the former class. Personally, for instance, one lived longer; morally, one, for instance, in point of fact, kept in better relations with Providence. Now this satisfaction was to be compassed partly by a certain inward insistence on feeling agreeable—“When I buy a pair of glasses of a seller of glasses, personally, I buy a pair that—a—slightly idealize”—partly by surrounding one’s self by, in point of fact, a judicious selection of circumstances. Circumstances were, in the main, people. One surrounded one’s self with—that is, one sought and lived among—agreeable people, and these were found commonly among such as had circumstances already agreeable. Selfishness was a word to keep on good terms with by understanding its nature, and making one’s own share of it intelligent. Enlightened selfishness was the root of society. Good society really consisted of people who had the time and took the pains to be pleasant and entertaining, in order to have pleasure and entertainment about them. This was the sensible and experienced thing in the matter of the pursuit of happiness.

“Nellie”—Thaddeus’s voice took a note of gravity—“you’ll let me have an interest in

“The Debatable Land”

your pursuit. Some time”—the wrinkles of his smile shot out around his eyes—“I’ll explain to you how it is a case of enlightened selfishness. Between you and me, I’m growing old, but ordinarily I deny it.”

It is possible that Nellie understood very little of Thaddeus’s doctrine, saw no distinct consequences whatever, and was only caught by little gleaming points of illustration. The charm of Thaddeus’s talk lay in its opalescent effect, and this had much to do with gesture and expression; so that “good society” may have been to her a phrase of the haziest quality, except as it might mean a pair of slightly idealized eye-glasses, rimmed with gold, and pointed at one in a manner to absorb attention; “happiness,” a certain wrinkled smile; and the “pursuit” of it an endeavor to smile in that way. Thaddeus thought his doctrine likely to suffer much translation. He could not follow its vanishing nor guess what would happen to it.

It was a period of brooding and slow change for Helen. At such times, one remembers, the soul was a highway for processional shadows. They have no names in language. Only here and there one finds a thing said of

“The Debatable Land”

them that is touched with recollection; their voices are heard at times in blown drifts of music; hints are given that it is not a solitary experience.

Monthly or even more often thereafter Thaddeus left his club and familiar pavements behind him, and travelled up the Wyantenaug Valley in a dull, noisy train, even through that winter when the cold wind swept down from Windless Mountain under the pines and piled drifts more than commonly along the Windless Mountain road. “Personally” he took no interest in the columned avenues of pines, the deep white ravine, the black, tinkling stream, the groined architecture of ice. He liked well enough the scents and balm of the country spring, the lilacs and the hill winds in summer, but he liked better his pavements and club. It argued a highly enlightened selfishness, a refined nicety of calculation, such pains to be agreeable. If we charge him with calculation, it is only to admire the refinement of it, and refer the charge to his doctrine. For if the confession that he was secretly growing old meant that he foresaw life would come presently to seem a little vacant, without the intimate interest it once had, and

“The Debatable Land”

his house on Shannon Street be visited perhaps by ghosts that would not always take pains to be agreeable, it would seem to show a skill in the pursuit of happiness, an eye for a blind trail, not unworthy of the doctrine. To foresee coming changes, what provision the soul would need in a year or two more when middle life was past and the strong pull of the ebbing tide beginning to be felt, to disguise from it the consequences of sixty years, and so to persuade it gently, without force or argument, to continue to idealize and feel agreeable, were a fine bit of diplomacy. For it was not merely a matter of carrying Helen away to Shannon Street to start there a fresh stream of interest, but Helen must take an interest in him; they were to find each other lovable, if the choicest result were to come; and Helen was here somewhat difficult. The stream of interest was started for him. He felt it strongly when the first year was gone and Hamilton was at its wintry busiest. But it was difficult to be seen that she would pursue happiness with consistency.

It was the spring of the year '60 when she saw the green world once more, and summer before she walked free of the garden. The

“The Debatable Land”

lilacs hung heavily and seemed almost to drip with thick perfume. Thrush, oriole, and bobolink were pursuing happiness and warbling their success. Thaddeus was there, and chirped in rivalry.

“But your mother would rather have something to submit to.”

“Oh no, Thaddeus,” protested the widow, mildly.

“You like the Lord to do you an injury. It makes a pretty item on the balance-sheet.”

“How can you say so?”

“My good sister!” Thaddeus raised despairing hands. “You consist entirely of negatives. There is no positive opinion that can be attributed to you. I give you a character and you deny it. You escape definition. Personally, I doubt your existence. I believe you’re a myth.”

Still the widow murmured, peacefully, “Oh no, Thaddeus,” knitting and rocking.

Thaddeus watched Nellie’s face for signs of happiness, and the widow denied with safety and assurance. It was no trouble, except to fit her denials to the form of the attack. Thaddeus saw the loss of his rapier thrusts

“The Debatable Land”

of fine casuistry sometimes with passing irritation.

He went down to the post-office after supper, to Mr. Paulus, the postmaster, one with whom he had gone forth on such balmy evenings, more than forty years past, and done things from which their elders had inferred disastrous careers. The postmaster was stout now, with grizzled hair cut Quakerly, ponderously grave, except that his left eyelid drooped and twitched. It was the one place on his wide face where the old spirit of demonry hinted of itself, and spoke of the days of the consulship of Tad and Pete. Without doubt the world was degenerate, and had lost its breed of noble bloods. Alas, Tad and Pete, once sworn and faithful, of one ideal together; now each in the eyes of the other was an exquisite absurdity, and all the young were degenerate, except Nellie. “Pete, she’s doing well, poor little ghost, on my word.”

“She’ll bust out pretty soon then. Been loadin’ up now goin’ on two year.”

“I shall take her to Hamilton. She’s a racer, boy. Smacked you with a paint-brush! God bless her! I should think she did. In point of fact, it served you right. You roasted Starr Atherton’s litter of pigs yourself, I rec-

“The Debatable Land”

ollect distinctly, and turned out a postmaster. Respectable profession. I’ve nothing against it.”

“I didn’t mean to.”

“Didn’t mean to which? Fatheaded thing to try to do anyhow. I told you—I precisely stated the probable result. I said, any pig of that size would squeal loud enough to wake a congregation. And Starr Atherton was out in the yard before he saw the fire, with a picture in his mind already of himself pursuing Peter Paulus, pig-stealer.”

Mr. Paulus twitched his eyelid and reverted to the other subject.

“Hamilton! Well—maybe she won’t. She might remember your position in society now. She might gunpowder the mayor an’ let it go at that. What’s in will out, that’s what I say—what’s in will out. Now, as to paintin’ cats—”

“I beg your pardon! It is even said they were not your cats.”

“As to smackin’ faces with paint-brushes—anybody say it wasn’t my face?”

Thaddeus leaned forward eagerly.

“What was the color?”

“Well — the paint was green, but there

“The Debatable Land”

must 've been some white on the brush. It appeared to be streaked.”

Thaddeus settled his glasses, rested his chin on his cane, and studied the postmaster's face. There were vast vacant spaces on it, where, it seemed, one could keep on smacking green paint a long while and not lose interest.

“What's in will out,” repeated Mr. Paulus, heavily. “What's in will out.”

Up the hill as far as the church Thaddeus thought of the post-office as compared to the Wyantenaug Club, in what respects the post-office had good points; from the church across the sloping green, where in the dusk the pale flowers glimmered against the grass, he thought of Mr. Paulus's face smitten with paint; and so of Nellie, a slim, white ghost, with eyes that sometimes looked wistfulness after nameless things, and sometimes seemed to watch only the slow march of dreams. At the lilac gate he stopped. Some one stood a moment squarely in the little doorway, filling it with his shoulders, then turned half back and leaned against the jamb.

“Morgan Map, by—a-mm.” The light shone across the profile in the door. The Maps were men of shoulders and stature, Morgan

“The Debatable Land”

the largest of the three; hair and brows of a Celtic yellow with a glint of red in them, a face of cliffs and caverns, bones of length and massiveness. “Picts, Scots, Caractacus, Vercingetorix,” Thaddeus murmured. “My education was faulty. It seems to me he should be painted blue and carry a club.”

He plucked a lilac and sniffed it, leaning on the gate, looking at Morgan contemplatively and at the placid knitting widow beyond.

“If I let that damned brute jockey me, it’s funny.”

The militant church with its starward steeple and weather-vane telling confidently to all men which way the night winds of heaven blew, the shining windows and doorways, the scent of lilacs and the glimmer of white flowers on the grass, the rounded billows of the hills, Windless Mountain and the Cattle Ridge dark against southern and northern skies, the Four Roads, the meadows east where one knew the Mill Stream was crooning to itself—Hagar, by dusk at least, was much the same as in the consulship of Tad and Pete, now forty years later when Tad and Pete had come to consider each other exquisite absurdities. Even after another forty years, is

“The Debatable Land”

there any change in Hagar at dusk? You cannot see how the charcoal-burners have cut along the Cattle Ridge. Tad and Pete have gone where one hopes for their sakes everything is not a solemnity. But we were speaking of Hagar when the night drops low, when the hills seem to draw near and listen, and something is said to the stars, which they admit, about past and future being foolish endeavors of language to say “now.” There seems to be a background and foreground everywhere. And in the foreground things appear to be hourly critical and important.

Morgan turned into the room and shut the door. Thaddeus dropped the lilac promptly and opened the gate.

“I seem to object to his shutting that door.” He walked up the garden path, tapping the ground briskly with his cane, seeming to have in mind things critical and important.

Chapter III

Of Morgan Map and his Purposes

EARLY frosts in October turned the maples into pillars of fire; followed a long Indian summer, hazy, even-footed, thoughtful days; as if after making ready this ceremonial purple and red and gold, gold brown of the meadows, blue and gold of aster and golden-rod by roadsides and meadow edges, veiled purple of the sweet fern in high pastures, the year remembered that it was not a pageantry of entry and advance, but of departure, and walked after the banners in recession mood. In November red and yellow leaves had flickered past the windows and were raked into heaps on the village green.

Helen kicked through the leaves, scattering them with a dry rustle. "I'm as fit as can be, Morgan."

"Don't jump the fence."

"I hadn't thought of it. It's the very thing."

"Wait."

“The Debatable Land”

She stopped and looked at him.

“Better not,” said Morgan, dryly. Helen made a face, put one foot on the low rail of the picket fence, jumped and plunged through the lilacs, picked up her hat and swung into the path. Morgan stood still outside the gate. “Then you’ll have to come out again and go through.”

His yellow eyebrows met over his eyes. Helen flushed, hesitated—“Don’t be an idiot,” and then laughed. “I’ll come if you don’t mind my thinking you’re an idiot.”

“I don’t mind your saying you think so.”

She came outside the gate, looking interested. Morgan leaned his back to its post and smiled approval on Windless Mountain.

“Why not?”

“Oh, because you don’t think so. You think I want you to do what I tell you. That’s very true; I do. Why shouldn’t you?”

The question involved a series of other questions, linked and secret. Helen fell to looking, too, at Windless Mountain, which seemed to be brooding as well over its constitutional phenomena, whose causes were ages ago and deep in the earth, its relations with other creat-

“The Debatable Land”

ures such as winds, clouds, the regular and the drifting stars.

She did do as Morgan said, whenever he said anything; at least, she had almost always. When one was Morgan and not a girl, and seven years older, and able to dare all things and do them—(to carry a person on his shoulder miles, for instance, across the Cattle Ridge, together with the game-bag, when a person was tired, and begging not to be disgraced for a baby, and would not have shed a tear for a gold crown and a bushel of diamonds)—of course it was right and necessary that such a one should be worshipped and obeyed. Morgan broke into her thoughts.

“Is it fixed when you go to Hamilton?”

“After Christmas. Do you know, I believe uncle doesn’t like you.”

“Oh, well, that’s all right. I’ll forgive him till he feels better.”

To fear nothing, to count no costs, to be unlimited! The two years seemed as long as lifetimes, since that summer when things happened; and Morgan was still Morgan. He had never cared who was angry with him, or who liked or disliked him. Helen had longed not to care and been bitterly driven to

“The Debatable Land”

do so always. She struggled to imitate him. In the face of sudden danger, attack of angry game-preserve or owner of posted stream, or any crisis of the woods when the partridge whirled or the fox broke into the open, Morgan's face would not flush nor his hand tremble; but he only seemed to gather his brows and centre himself on the subject, while little Nellie wondered and worshipped. So he stood for an ideal of effectiveness and freedom from the tyranny of circumstances, which to her small experience and large deduction seemed visibly to bend aside before and around him, from the tyranny of other people's opinions, which he cared so little about that they turned into harmless murmurs behind him instead of planting themselves monumentally in front.

For at times this world appeared to exist for opposition only, in iron battle order, bristling with spears, stolid, reasonless, forbidding. It was a caste system, a privileged aristocracy of one's elders, the dead-line of an old régime. Morgan walked through it promptly. “People,” he said, “pretend a lot more than they are, most of 'em. My dad doesn't so much.”

But freedom seems not to be an end in itself, only an opportunity to do things differently.

“The Debatable Land”

It has its own régime, its tyranny of devotions, heroisms, and heroes, military, imperial.

That Morgan proposed a Napoleonic career for himself—reasonably such, for he was no dreamer—that he proposed to dominate, to break through limits and oppositions, to drive a path through the jam of men wide enough for his shoulder muscles to work in, was merely his own candid statement. And regarding Thaddeus, his expression sprang equally from candor. A man’s dislike for him was a poor reason for disliking that man. To carry malice was to carry a load. A man was an engine for covering ground and arriving at ends, and malice was burned-out slack. Resentments of old hostilities and memories of old loves were slack, likes and dislikes mostly whims. Mankind was various and whimsical, and few were such as discarded futilities and went on, which was lucky for the few.

“You’re very sure of yourself, Morgan.”

“Aren’t you as sure of me, Nellie? You used to be. Well,” he said, slowly, “you see, if Thaddeus Bourn tried to take a fall out of me, he’d want to be subtle, and then it would be all up with him, for I shouldn’t understand it.”

“The Debatable Land”

“Why should he want to take a fall out of you?”

“If he doesn’t, why should I mind his disliking me?”

“Wouldn’t you mind being disliked by anybody, until they did something, really?”

“Not much.”

“Oh! Not by me?”

“I’d rather be disliked by the United States. Besides, that’s foolish.”

“Oh, I don’t know. It’s funny, I have an opinion of you that’s miles long. It isn’t exactly an opinion, either.”

Morgan smiled again with approval on Windless Mountain.

“If you’re going to be subtle I sha’n’t understand it,” meaning possibly it was the privilege of girls to have half-grown ideas that they could not describe. A man had business with only such as he could handle, put to the use of resolve, statement, or persuasion. If he was unable to express his mind completely, it was because there was rubbish in his mind. But between himself and Windless Mountain, he did not object to Helen’s having an opinion of him that was not exactly an opinion.

“The Debatable Land”

Any one could have an understanding with Windless, that eclectic philosopher, with his feet deep in the earth, fertile loins, jovial belly, the chest of a wrestler, and the gray, scarred head of a prophet. On his flanks were chuckling little rivulets, nesting birds, and all kinds of flitting incident. From a distance you might see his forehead lifted to abstractions, pale-blue, spiritual things. Whatever you said to him, he had an answer to your liking. Whatever your philosophy, somewhere about him he felt much the same. If you hated an enemy, there was a trifle of ice, a certain ambient glacier that once ground him badly, of whom he had no loving remembrance and the grooves whereof were on his bones. He was no moralist. The liar and the thief could find companionship there, the outcast existences more deserted, the murderer note the hawk risen red and screaming from the thicket, and admit a spirit that bettered his own. Only if you were not content in finding a likeness in detail, and wished to look straight to his scarred forehead, you would probably do well to be candid and take your time. What you got from him would be no special advice, but an assurance that he understood you, and there

“The Debatable Land”

would be something in his manner of understanding that would meet the case and be enough. If it was a moral influence, it lay in bringing you to see the relations of things in size and quality, and in making your own directions more evident.

“I like Windless best,” said Helen, dreamily.
“He’s the nicest person there is.”

“It would be no joke to have him in your way.”

They turned into the garden and up the path between brown, withered flower-beds.

“I jumped the fence, anyway, Morgan. It would be idiotic to hurt myself. I won’t do it again.”

“The point was, you didn’t mind the colonel.”

“I’m on a furlough. Take me up Windless again.”

“Not if you’re on a furlough.”

Chapter IV

In which Thaddeus uses the term "Moral Justification"

IN the early days of Squire Map's seclusion he had not yet made the hermit of himself that Hagar was familiar with later. Men have said that he never went outside the village after the fall of '58, at least never to Hamilton. The grooves where his bitterness ran plainly deepened as the stream wore them year by year; possibly the gradual noting how his withdrawal made no empty place among busy men, how feigning friends who had turned enemies and rebellious sons went their way and prospered, helped to widen and darken the shadow of his misanthropy. He had been a lawyer, a politician, and made his stir in his day. In 1860 he was a gray, grim gentleman in a long coat and tall, black hat, with a caverned, bony face and large frame, whom it was not considered wisdom to address without good reason, but who was seen often enough about the village.

“The Debatable Land”

And it was not so strange as to startle Widow Bourn in her halcyon calm when he knocked at her door one afternoon, and entered, doffing his tall hat.

“I hope I don’t disturb you, Mrs. Bourn.” The widow signified her unruffled comfort and hoped he would sit down.

“With your permission, I will do so.”

Followed a pause while the widow pursued her knitting, and the squire’s reddish, bushy eyebrows drooped and gathered, while he studied a patch of sunlight on the floor.

“I recollect that my son Morgan and your daughter Nellie were once quite inseparable, a companionship regarded as singular, considering the difference in ages, not common between a young man, approximately, and a child. It was, however, I believe, a fact.”

“Morgan was always fond of Nellie.”

The widow hoped secretly that, whatever he intended to say, he would continue to put it in the form of statements with which it was no trouble to agree.

“I am told he has been here of late—in fact, frequently.”

That also was true. The widow wondered

“The Debatable Land”

why people were afraid of Squire Map. He was a very comfortable person to talk with.

“Sickness or misfortune is not, if I understand his character, a thing that ordinarily interests my son Morgan. I need not point out to you that young people of a certain age are apt to give much attention to the subject of marriage.”

The widow felt a twinge of discomfort. It was but slight. She objected that Nellie was young, hardly more than a child.

“In apprehension of the future, then, Mrs. Bourn, I have to say that I doubt whether any young woman will find the happiness that is due her in such an intimate relation with my son Morgan. I more than doubt it.”

The widow dropped her knitting and stared helplessly.

“That is perhaps all I have to say, Mrs. Bourn. I apprehend something of the character of your daughter Nellie. Her good looks are remarkable, her disposition and intelligence even more interesting. That may not be my only motive in coming here. Whatever the motive, I beg you to believe the warning is entirely candid.”

The widow felt herself in the shadow of a

“The Debatable Land”

vague distress, painfully called upon to say something appropriate. She murmured that Nellie was going to live with her uncle that winter. The squire raised his hedge of eyebrows suddenly.

“In Hamilton?”

With her uncle Thaddeus, the elder brother of Simon. He had taken so much interest in Nellie.

The squire mused. Yes. Could Mrs. Bourn, if Mr. Thaddeus Bourn again visited Hagar, contrive to suggest to him personally that his former friend, Gerald Map, remembered him with pleasure and would be under obligation to Mr. Bourn if he, Mr. Thaddeus Bourn, would call upon him, Gerald Map?

The squire then took his leave. He came upon Morgan himself crossing the green with his gun and hunting-dog. They faced each other and stopped. Mr. Paulus from the post-office below the hill observed them.

“Resemblin’,” he remarked, “two rams that’s goin’ to butt lightnin’ out of themselves in a minute.”

“You still visit Hagar, then?” said the squire, his voice muttering thunder.

“Quite often.”

“The Debatable Land”

The trick of the gathered eyebrows was curiously common to both. The squire took his time.

“You intend to marry Miss Helen Bourn?”

“I’ve been figuring on that for seven years. You haven’t found me changing my mind. I intend to do it.”

“I intend to prevent it, Morgan.”

“In Nellie’s interest, sir?”

“I regard it as in her interest.”

“I mean, is that your interest in it?”

“I shall not say.”

“I didn’t feel encouraged to think it was an interest in me. But it’s natural to ask.”

“Quite natural.”

The squire walked a few steps, stopped and looked back, his eyebrows drooping over their melancholy caves. “I take no interest in your success in any direction. I shall be measurably interested in your failures. Whenever you have a failure to report, and are inclined to report it personally, I shall be glad to see you.”

“That’s an odd offer, sir.” Morgan swung his gun over his shoulder. “I never saw any real need of a row, and I don’t yet. And I don’t pretend to understand the mixture now.”

“The Debatable Land”

The squire went his way without answering. Morgan looked after him, then at his hunting-dog sniffing among the heaps of fallen leaves, at Windless Mountain, and found nothing suggestive. He walked slowly towards the Bourn house.

Ordinarily a man spent his time better in understanding his own purposes than the purposes of other men. On the whole, they were more easily thrust aside than understood. That was Morgan's settled conviction or characteristic. He did not mean to make an exception in favor of the squire. At the same time, “take an interest in your failures” had an odd sound, and inviting him to come and report them was a bit cool, if he only wanted to gloat over them. Hardly in “dad's” style, anyway. “Gloating” was a futile occupation. The way the squire had taken that row had been futile enough. But the question was whether he could really do anything to make a nuisance of himself. It not appearing how he could, Morgan concluded to shake off the subject, quickened his pace, and whistled to his dog.

Mr. Paulus remarked, despondently, from his philosophic distance, “I most thought they'd do some buttin'.”

“The Debatable Land”

His despondency led to reminiscence. “Seems to me folks ain’t so lively as when I was a boy. The town’s runnin’ down.”

He stood in his shirt-sleeves, though there was a bleakness in the wind that hinted of December. The bare branches of the maples creaked, and the dead leaves fled up the road in a whirl of dust.

It was late in December when Thaddeus came to Hagar again, a Hagar of gray, frozen roads, little patches of dry, drifted snow, and nights falling early. Mr. Paulus sat by a lamp in the rear of the half-lit store, out of sorts with rheumatism and by reason of human nature. It was five o’clock. Thaddeus entered with an air of happy secrecy, planted himself, white-skinned, wrinkled, smiling, before Mr. Paulus’s red-and-round-faced gloom.

“Pete, I’ve been to see Gerald Map. Upon my word! Singular interview, which I shall not tell you anything about.”

“Ain’t no need,” grumbled Mr. Paulus. “Been agreein’ on your epitaphs, an’ it’s about time. Like to make epitaphs for all the danged fools in town myself, an’ fit the corpses to the dates.”

“The Debatable Land”

Thaddeus sat down carefully, and wiped his glasses with snowy handkerchief, leaning forward to the light; adjusted them, leaned back, and rubbed his hands softly.

“Pete, when you’ve made up your mind about something, it’s a satisfaction to happen on—a—unexpectedly—a moral justification of it. It really is.”

“Don’t want one. Wouldn’t have no use for it. After those folks ’d seen their epitaphs I’d writ ’em, if they didn’t do what was decent—”

“A—I was referring,” Thaddeus insinuated, “to myself.”

“You were!” Mr. Paulus reflected, dropped his eyelid, and grew a shade more cheerful. “Moral justification! Well—I caught Cummings’s boy stealin’ plug tobacco th’ other day. An’ he said he wanted it for Halligan. Guess he did. Likely Halligan give him three cents for a five-cent plug. He looked the picture of virtue, anyhow; said he never chawed: he wa’n’t up to no such viciousness. Moral justification! It’s a good thing.”

Thaddeus smiled absently, pursed his lips, and was silent.

“Pete,” he said at last, “how does green paint feel?”

“The Debatable Land”

Mr. Paulus's gloom faded away, and his interest, his love of life, came gently back.

“Wet,” he said, thoughtfully. “Gets stiff after dryin’.”

“Ah,” murmured Thaddeus, “exactly.”

A few days later Helen and Thaddeus took their way down the Wyantenaug Valley to Hamilton, and left Hagar to the wintry hills and Widow Bourn to her own manner of content.

CHAPTER V

Introducing Hamilton and Saint Mary's Organ

HAMILTON took its name from a little English hamlet. The statesman was a coincidence. It lies in a bend of the Wyantenaug River, which hardly ripples on the piers of its docks, ten miles from the sea and at the head-water of the river's navigation. Its colonial memories gather about the Common where the first settlers built their church and cluster of shingled houses, and about the docks where ships from the South Seas used to come in at flood-tide, from the capes and the Indian Ocean, from the West Indies and from England, whalers, too, and many fishing-smacks. The Common is half a mile from the docks. The old church stands in the centre of it. Century elms and oaks are scattered about, not planted in regular rows; but wherever it had seemed to be a good place for a tree, there the tree had grown. On the south side, or Main Street, are the court-house and city hall; on the east side, or Charles

“The Debatable Land”

Street, are the Constitution and Wyantenaug clubs and a church with twin steeples; on the north side, or James Street, square brick and stuccoed residences, with lawns, and sometimes a silent fountain or solitary marble statue, such as that dancing faun which appears to dislike its occupation; on the west side, or Academy Street, there are stores and a hotel, but farther up Academy Street are the law-school buildings, farther still the academy itself, founded in the reign of William and Mary, where from of old the Latin declensions were learned with the aid of a ferule and curiously called “humane letters.”

All the flat, green meadows that once stretched west and south from near by the Common as far as the river are filled with brick blocks and industry now—stores, factories, and tenements. Two railroads run in subways to the station and bridge at the bend in the river. Jamaica, India, and Academy streets follow the old meadow roads, along which merchants in tie-wigs used to drive leisurely to the docks, where a leisurely ship or two would be lying, and there examine their consignments. North and east of the Common in the angle between Main and Academy streets lies the section in

“The Debatable Land”

which those for the most part used to live who maintained mahogany tables and were able to exercise choice as to where they would live. Shannon Street runs from the northwest corner of the Common diagonally northeastward, crossing three irregular openings, mis-called squares, where muddles of streets came together, and monuments have been erected to commemorate two wars and a distinguished judge. It ends in Temple Square, which marks its exclusiveness, and at the same time admits the aristocracy of Shannon Street by having no other entrance than Shannon Street. The houses about the square are much alike, stuccoed, severe, with small porches, pillars, and iron fences close to the sidewalk. The centre of the square has a high iron fence about it, gates with scrollwork, which are commonly shut.

The house of Thaddeus faced on Philip's Road and Shannon Street, not far from the monument to the War of 1812, the two streets meeting at dull angles in front. There was more of it on Philip's Road, but it was numbered with Shannon Street, because to live on Shannon Street was a better principle. The

“The Debatable Land”

street signs of Philip's Road at different times had been changed to "Pequot Avenue," with a view to euphony and a securer social position, but the commissioners were not persistent enough, and nature was against them. The name hinted it once to have been an Indian trail, or at least that some person had said so; and whether this person was truthful and informed was forgotten, too. The chronicles but mentioned the tradition. The road showed a certain furtive vagrancy, running from the theatre at the corner of the fair grounds barbarously and disorderly through two blocks, otherwise of a shape without reproach, and shying away from the law school—an instinct of untamed nature. It approached Shannon Street gradually with sullen suspicion, caught sight of the monument of 1812, plunged suddenly across, ran riot through a number of blocks, and escaped into the open country. So that Thaddeus's house was numbered on Shannon Street.

Charles Street ran by it on the west, and so past Saint Mary's Church directly to the Common. Helen looked first from the west window of her room on Charles Street and saw bare boughs of maple-trees shining in the cold moon-

“The Debatable Land”

light, and across the way a long row of glimmering vestibules and curtains; then from the south window, and saw a house with a large, glowing window beyond a vacant space of lawn, over it the apse at the rear of a church, with two small steeples, and farther on and up the big steeple and gilded cross glittering in the mist of the moon. A lady walked past and past the glowing window. The room within looked warm, mellow, peaceful, but she seemed restless. Once she stopped and even seemed to gaze up at Helen, but her face was in shadow. Helen thought she was tall and had thick hair.

Some one was playing the organ in Saint Mary's, a sombre mutter and deep breathing underneath, wild voices calling and crying above. More voices gathered; they struggled, strained, shrieked reproach, and wailed for pity, till one by one they were hushed and only the measured breathing went on.

In the morning Thaddeus said: “You’ve done very well. I’ve heard that the two things most worth while in Hamilton now are to see Mrs. Maverig and hear Gard Windham’s playing. Personally—” Thaddeus poised his coffee-cup, “as regards Mrs. Maverig, I believe

“The Debatable Land”

that to be correct. As regards the other, it has sometimes seemed to me that it was not exactly—a—civilized; that, in point of fact, it appeared to be at times—it might be said to be at times—a kind of description of society among the fallen angels—an objectionable subject for comment so public, I should say, distinctly. It appears, I might say, to lack restraint—a—good taste. I seem to see a person in impossible garments dancing on the roof of Saint Mary’s with great impatience, and stating his distress in strong language. Personally, therefore, I wish Gard Windham would keep his spectres out of my back yard, and—my dear Helen! I beg of you, don’t look at me in such a—a—vast manner. Mr. Windham is considered a remarkable musician.”

“I saw him too, Uncle Tad.”

“On my word! Where?”

“On the roof. He was acting that way you said.”

“Well, bless my soul!”

Thaddeus walked down-town thoughtfully. “She’ll run off after one of Gard Windham’s ghosts the next thing. No more than likely. She has an imagination that’s as honest as

“The Debatable Land”

the bank and the finest pair of eyes, my word, in Hamilton.”

In the afternoon Morgan came with his trotting stallion, Consul, and drove her by Philip’s Road to the fair grounds to show his paces on the track. The day was cold, dry, blue, and still, but on the track the speed made a rush of air against her face. The fair grounds were empty, the track with a patch of snow here and there, the stands staring from thousands of empty seats.

The great horse lengthened his stride. He was all power and ease. Such controlled crescendo of speed seemed to mean deep reserves. There was a thrill in the sense of those reserves.

“Do you like it, Nellie?”

“It’s glorious!”

“Of course you like it. Hold hard.”

“You’re the right stuff, Nell,” he said at Thaddeus’s door.

Morgan’s commendations of her had always been rare enough to be thrilling. Her head sang with “Morgan, Morgan,” the victorious, the controlling. The sound of Consul’s hoofs, the rush of wind in her face, the flying objects, had been only expressions of the beat and

“The Debatable Land”

rush of his will. The sense of him was overwhelming. It surprised her to find that Thaddeus appeared smaller than ordinary, more frail and artificial. He seemed to be chattering things without significance. It was the contrast with Morgan's immense genuineness and direct speech, and because to have one's mind filled with Morgan was to be forced imperiously to look at things in Morgan's way, which was an absolute way. It brought one to despise decorations, mannerisms, whatever did not come to the point and justify itself; to summon all vague emotion and half-formed ideas of one's own to pay their way or admit bankruptcy and disappear; to expect other people to meet one with the same solidity of surface. Conversation, according to Morgan, which consisted of an exchange of intuitions, was a kind of inflated currency; the bulk of it was irredeemable; there might be a bullion fact or two behind, but to try to do business on the basis of it was futile. A man might either pay good coin or counterfeit for purposes of his own, but why play ducks and drakes with himself? Thaddeus Bourn, by an odd inconsistency, was a business man of some acumen, who outside of that chose to pretend

“The Debatable Land”

to be a child with strings of beads, and had nothing visible to gain by it. A sentimentalist was the most irritating of men, who wasted his time pretending to be more of a fool than he was.

So that Helen became engaged in judging Thaddeus severely, silently, under Morgan's principles.

“Helen,” said Thaddeus, using an interpretative eye-glass, “permit me to say you're exceedingly young, delightfully young. I am pleased that you enjoyed your drive. Our friend Morgan is an interesting barbarian. In course of time, no doubt, you will see the advantages of civilization.”

“What do you mean, Uncle Tad?” she said, pursuing cash values.

“There is a kind of barbarism,” continued Thaddeus, “which refuses to be civilized, and, in point of fact, eats the missionary. It finds the missionary in that capacity good, and goes its way with—with congratulation. It is striking; really, there is an impressive simplicity about it; but, dear me, you know it will never do. It's a little— isn't it a little obtuse? At least, my dear—at least, one might be allowed to doubt whether—it does not seem so, personally, to the missionary.”

“The Debatable Land”

Thaddeus could hardly have hoped to dissipate any dominant sense of Morgan from Helen's mind with such fugitive sayings. He was probably testing, considering. “We are all egoists, my dear, except a few women. Morgan is the primitive and aboriginal egoist. He is—a—aggressive, carnivorous. I am a social egoist; your father, who wished, with emphasis, to be remembered, was, pardon me, a regretful egoist; your mother is a contented and unaggressive egoist. And so every one has, so to speak, a class. It is no reproach; it is nature, my dear—law. Why pretend to escape? But,” he concluded, with grace and precision, “there is a choice, and in matters of choice I always take pleasure in pointing out to you the advantages of civilization.”

Morgan still headed the march of Helen's dreams. The same moon, a little fuller than the night before, laying a thicker wash of silver, hung over the apse of Saint Mary's. She looked from her window at the roofs where the organ player's spectre had seemed to be dancing then, mistily, wildly, to the storm of sound below. The friendly window was dim, which the lady had walked past and past, restless, tall, thick-haired.

“The Debatable Land”

How strong and wonderful was Morgan! What more could there be under the moon and stars than the will to dare and the power to do? Helen had no name for the spell. Only of late had she thought of it in detail. In old times the word “Morgan” itself expressed the whole subject. It described the beginning and the end of things.

The organ began to breathe somewhere behind the stained windows that were just glimmering. It seemed to be laying the foundations of its temple of sound on the undermost bed-rock. Now it was lifting the walls, and one gathered and knew gradually how vast was the weight of the masonry; how the power beneath that raised it foot by foot was vaster still; how sure of itself was the power beneath, for certainly it only used one hand to force that steady climb of masonry; the other ran along, chiselling designs, gargoyles, pale statues in niches, sweeping a series of half-circles and filling them with deep-sea and warmest sunset color till, lo! it was a rose window.

Helen breathed fast, pressing her face to the cold pane. Something here, too, was strong!

She snatched a cloak, sped through halls, down stairs, through more halls and a back

“The Debatable Land”

door, out into the moonlit yard. There was only a low iron fence to jump, and she was under the curve of the apse. A door stood half open in the corner where it joined the main building, and within was a swing-door which yielded noiselessly. It was quite dark there under the gallery, but a few gas-lights flickered in the chancel and shone on lower ranges of gilded organ-pipes, banked away beyond in a kind of transept, and on a choir screen that hid the organist. A few dusky figures could be made out sitting in pews here and there in the nave. Helen crept into a seat next a stone pillar that felt rugged and cool, and was pushed forward partly into the pew.

The building of the temple had ceased, its visionary masonry, carvings, and rose window vanished at a touch withdrawn. The organ was murmuring down among the old foundations of the world, communing with the beginnings of time, meditating to rise out of the deep with a new creation. Otherwise the church was so still that the air seemed heavy with the stillness.

A multitude of fleeting, flickering sounds broke out, like a burst of fireworks, the air full of shooting-stars, blown bubbles, and tinsel.

“The Debatable Land”

There was a piping and dancing in the sunlight on delicate meadow grass, by pipers and dancers who could not conceivably grow old. Then a voice spoke suddenly among them. One could not tell where it came from or what it said. It was cold, sombre, indifferent. But it ceased and the dancing went on, more bacchanal now. There were perfumes, garlands on hot foreheads, shrieking and whirring of stringed instruments, high laughter, and swinging in circles. The loud, cold voice spoke again, and left no echoes or after-murmurs. Something more quiet followed, as if the memory of fear could not be quite put away, or remained in the form of an altered mood. People walked hand-in-hand. There was warm twilight and the ripple of a flowing river. After all, life was sweeter for seriousness, love best in the stillness and twilight. The cold, insistent voice rose, a stone pillar of sound, and all these things became complaining ghosts before its weightier reality. So that at length and in the end it remained alone, except for the mutter in the pit below, and there was no triumph in its victory, but it continued cold, sombre, indifferent, monotonous, heavy.

Some one beyond the pillar sighed in the

“The Debatable Land”

darkness, and a hand fell on Helen's hand which gripped the edge of the seat. Helen started and whispered, “Oh, that was hateful!”

“I beg your pardon.”

“He plays like anything, but—” She came out of her absorption to know that she had been whispering her thoughts into the darkness, and that the darkness had given forth an apology. A shadow the other side of the little stone pillar seemed to be leaning forward now and looking at her. A dress rustled.

“The music was sad, was it not?” and Helen whispered again:

“They tried all sorts of ways, and tried and tried, but it never was any use, and they gave up and died.”

“Did it seem so clear? He's beginning again.”

It was a kind of nocturne or slumber song, a rocking movement with a flute tone moving through a dimmer mist of harmonies, soothing here and there a restless chord. “Has He not made the night for your slumber, and darkened the earth for your sleep, and lit the earth softly with stars, and moved it among them as a child's cradle is rocked? Wake, then, if you may not sleep, but only to watch the

“The Debatable Land”

moon rising and hear the croon of the sea. Murmur and motion, motion and murmur; but remember wonder, remember beauty, and let not anything persuade you from them. A moon and a sea be in your heart, a hush of an inner place. *Ora pro nobis*, and for the growth of flowers on ancient graves. *Requiescant in pace*, souls stately and dead. If the truth is a dream, then the dream is true, and therefore He made the night for your slumber, and darkened and lit the earth and moved it softly among stars, and gave to the moon its rising and to the sea its motion and murmur.”

They went out by the swing-door together, passed from the shadow of the apse to the level yard, and stopped.

“I think your name is Helen Bourn,” said the other. “Mine is Rachel Mavering. You will come to see me often. We are so near.”

Chapter VI

Introducing Gard Windham and the Brotherhood of Consolation

ONE warm, rainy evening in the year '44, and in the great city that is flanked on either side by a river and a strait, Father Andrew plodded along an avenue of small shops, whose windows rested their chins on the wet sidewalk and blinked through steaming panes. His dingy umbrella dripped in the rain, and the skirts of his robe flapped against his white stockings. He had in his mind no more than presently the opening of the door in the brick wall of a cloister court, the sleepy roll of the vesper service, refection, complines, a little private, companionable prayer, such as ever seems to be heard kindly if one is trustful, and then the sleep which comes to tired saint and sinner alike with singular tolerance. Alas! one's fat legs became tired enough with climbing stairways, and the soul sore with its strained sympathies.

“The Debatable Land”

A lean, wet-haired boy, plodding past him, glanced up with large, drowsy-lidded eyes, and slid under his broad umbrella, making no comment. Father Andrew chuckled and sighed. Giving and taking were a simple incident, if giving were merely to carry an umbrella for two, taking merely to step under it, and charity were not charity but companionship.

“Where are you going?”

“I guess I’ll go with you,” after hesitating.

“But where did you come from?”

“Lappo’s.”

“And where’s Lappo?”

“I don’ know. He’s dead.”

Father Andrew chuckled and sighed again. Very likely he could not have decided himself, from any earthly information, where Lappo was. “Was it Lappo the fruit-seller? Yes, yes. And what is your name?”

“Gard Windham.”

“Good— Well, well! A—mm— And Lappo wasn’t your father? Who was?”

“I don’ know.”

“Anybody know?”

“I guess they don’t.”

“Well, what—that is, dear me! You don’t say so! I mean, where’d he get you?”

“The Debatable Land”

“Got me to the Foundlings. Lappo”—
speaking in the way of quiet conversation—
“Lappo had fits.”

“Yes, yes. Ga—”

“Gard Windham.”

Father Andrew fell to patting one fat hand on the back of the other, which gripped the umbrella. It was his habit to pat one hand softly over the other whenever he was giving himself advice, or found himself driven to some conclusion which could not be soothed or softened by any more logical method. “Yes, yes. Dear me!” A life probably of unsanctioned origin. It was apt to be the reason for the closed door and the lost key.

They came to the door in the brick wall, and went from the street that murmured sadly with the rain, into the little paved court that murmured sadly with the rain.

Then Father Andrew sat down before the Father Superior, whose black eyes glowed and dreamed, and felt himself like a small particle of dust, happy in its humility.

“It is as you say,” said the Superior. “A door is closed behind it. Consecration is sometimes the more complete.”

Father Andrew murmured that it was, and

“The Debatable Land”

thought of the refectory and a salad he knew of with peppers in it. He was used to thinking of salads when he should not be thinking of them. He was sorry for it, and knew that he had no claim to anything but humility.

“The face promises and threatens,” mused the Superior. “How often is it that the highest that is spiritual is based on the strongest that is worldly.”

The Superior was a man of symbols and analogies, swarthy of skin and large of frame, one whose conceptions came red from their furnace. Father Andrew’s mind was nestled the rather in a certain padded placidity. Moreover, there was the salad, with its peppers. No doubt, if the Superior saw promises of a more than common consecration, and threatenings of peculiar importance in this young person without origin, it was a thing to be expected of the Superior’s holy and profound discernment. The Superior’s spiritual enterprise was ever extraordinary. He was of such as had from the beginning fought in the vanguard of the Church, and been her glory and adornment. For himself, Father Andrew discerned little further than to feel that his duty of distributing the brotherhood’s charities would

“The Debatable Land”

be easier if every one had the young person's native assurance. He felt that Providence, clearly with a purpose, had bestowed upon himself such limited insight wherewith to be content. It enabled him at least to admire the Superior without limit. He went his way to the salad and the peppers, and Gard remained in the house of the Brotherhood of Consolation.

It was a Catholic order, somewhat quiet in its ways. Not many of the brothers were like the Superior, whose faith was a yearning in the blood as fiery as young love, and for whom night-long struggles of prayer appeared to be a normal way of living. For the most part they seemed to be elderly men, keeping the rule without any apparent effort, but rather as something it would be an effort to vary from. Probably they were happier than most, in the shuffle of fate, manage to be. It would be difficult to show they were not. The monastery bell clinked at small intervals of the day and night, and slippered feet were ever going whispering down the corridors on the heels of the sliding moment, to place some office of performance or prayer accurately in its

“The Debatable Land”

little division of time. And this method and regulation of hours, so old, so grown from measureless experience and minute knowledge of humanity, seemed to be a kind of setting or framework to keep in place, till their times came, the souls for whom atonement was accomplished; or for the others, to keep the saving of their souls in orderly process of accomplishment. The faces of all except the Superior looked something alike. They broke easily into smiles, but laughter seldom went beyond a happy chuckle.

The window of Gard's little cell looked over the court against the face of a dead wall that ended a block of uniform houses. The cloister covered two of the remaining sides, a brick wall ten feet high the fourth, and a thick wooden door led through this into the street. The court was asphalted, except for a strip under the dead wall, where one Brother Francis planted things hopefully every spring, and found entertainment all summer in the ill-advised efforts they made to grow.

It was Francis who taught Gard his Latin accidents, and later the writings of those dignified heathen, Cæsar and Tullius Cicero; later still his Greek, in which language appeared

‘The Debatable Land’

the writings of one Herodotus, and of others called “Fathers of the Church,” of whom he might disbelieve Herodotus if he chose—an unnecessary distinction; he believed them all fervently. One of his vivid memories was the delivering before brothers Francis and Andrew, with violence and tears, the oration, “Tandem aliquando, Quirites,” with indignation because both chuckled without intermission, and would not see the importance of condemning Catiline. Francis had general charge of the monastery school, which was filled and emptied daily through a special door on the avenue. But the scholars seldom went further than reading and writing, sums and fractions, and the lives of those saints who had had the more interesting adventures; so that, under the Superior’s permission, to lead Gard into these high places of learning was a pleasure to which Francis surrendered himself, he feared, with sinful abandonment.

Music, Gard studied with one Brother Johannes, who played the little organ in the white-washed chapel, all white except by the altar, where there was a distinction of gilded wood-work, silver candlesticks, and purple cloths, and so cold in winter that one’s fingers were

“The Debatable Land”

numb on the keys. He was an old, bowed-over man, Johannes, with frail, waxen hands, absent-minded, apt to forget his rule and be late, and not understand why the Superior persisted in modifying his discipline. He feared the Superior estimated his sins too lightly, and died in the year '52, when Gard was seventeen. Gard had to play the organ at offices after that, and to go daily three blocks up the avenue to the church of the Sacred Trinity, and take his lesson from Fritz Moselle, a mighty German from Strassburg, near the Rhine. He learned many things besides harmony and counterpoint of Fritz, who was a cosmopolitan, and believed not in the faith of man or woman; but he believed that art was the one country of the soul, and that in conduct it was the duty of every one to “do as he *verdammt* please.”

“Look you, *kleiner!* In de mass—yes. Some monk he haf art in him—Gott, yes! He found a place for his soul to live in. He know diese vorltdt was a circus, und he vas a lil’ boy und can’t go. He mus’ stay to home. Ach! he feel sad. Und by-and-by he compose music to a circus in hefen, vich vas de mass you play yesterday. Aber you mus’ play de Bach fugue severe. Maybe you make a good monk,

“The Debatable Land”

but you haf too much luxury in your bones to play de Bach fugue, *hein?* No? Play den, p’tit anchorite, und let each of your fingers be von of de Ten Commandments, or Gott! you don’ play him not any.” The organ at Trinity was quite another matter than the little one which wheezed plaintively in the brotherhood’s whitewashed chapel.

Once a week he had to go to the Superior and be examined, and probably read a chapter of St. Augustine. It was a ceremony of indefinite length, for the Superior sometimes fell into a monologue, fervid as St. Augustine’s, while walking to and fro; and Gard used to imagine the room full of spirits and misty angels, listening—all of them—breathless, astonished, and a little frightened; for there could not be any one who was not afraid of the Superior, unless it were the *bonus Deus*, and even He must be astonished. At length the great, swarthy man would lay his hand on Gard’s head—a large hand, lean and strong, and vibrating with the throb and blast of the furnace that was in him.

“Oh, Infinite and Tender, if it is needed for the saving of this young soul, send him sorrow and pain, and let his grief be deep.” And

“The Debatable Land”

Gard would come away tingling like the bells of Trinity, which had a chime of twenty, and it made the bell-tower rock to play them hard. He never after lost the impression that those interviews, of all kinds of human experience, probably most resembled death and resurrection, and things likely to happen at the gate of the celestial city. He grew to something over a medium, slim height at this time, had drowsy eyelids, and wakeful gray eyes under them. He laughed with a bass voice, liked brothers Francis and Andrews, and Fritz Moselle, and worshipped the Superior, but preferred to dodge him. The preference was probably a sin, one which Brother Francis claimed to have prayed for in himself some twenty years without effecting. He discovered that the Superior, Francis, and Fritz Moselle had each severally a distinct point of view, and that you could tell beforehand in what direction their interpretations of anything would point. He found that he liked the organ in Trinity better than Cicero, and watching the throng of men and women, with bright colors in their hats, as he went to and from the brotherhood and Trinity, if not better, at least differently, than either. And in the year '55 he discovered

“The Debatable Land”

that he was expected presently to take the vows, and awoke to the further fact that the idea filled him with melancholy. It resembled to him a sandy desert, with not an oasis in sight, not a palm-tree against the sky.

The children who followed the piper of Hame-lin, the mariners of Odysseus who cocked their ears to the sirens, and other harkers to such instrumental enchantment, have reported experiences that are much alike. They heard, it seems, a high, thin fluting, ineffably sweet, which seemed to imply that just beyond those blue hills, or those white breakers, or a few turns of the next street, there lay an extraordinary region overrun with smiling probabilities; for there, whatever one dreamed of most was more than likely to be found, whether it was sugar-plums, or a girl in the brake with sunny hair, or a sword and shield, and a banner to follow withal.

But when Gard told Father Andrew that he would not take the vows, Father Andrew acted as if it were a new thing, and lifted his fat hands helplessly.

“Good— A— Dear me! That is, I mean, why not?”

“The Debatable Land”

Then he patted Gard's hand with his soft palm, and chuckled and sighed.

“But it's true,” Gard said. “I'll tell you why.”

“The blessed — I mean, don't! Tell the Superior.” And he scuttled away in alarm, murmuring, “I wish that boy didn't surprise me so.”

It had not occurred to Gard, but evidently he must tell the Superior; and how could the Superior be made to understand about the high fluting, and that it said “Follow, follow,” so that one needs must go; and all about the sugar-plums and the girl in the brake, and the banner and sword and shield? And, if not, what was there to tell the Superior, more than to make a bare statement of his rooted ingratitude, his incorrigibly evil nature, and his resolve to go? Probably there was not another such case in the history of orders, and he would be excommunicated. He knew the Superior had meant him to be peculiarly consecrated, and, because he had no origin back of the Foundlings' Hospital, had thought him a soul only the better fitted to be seized and sent heavenward powerfully. What right had he to interfere with the Superior's great purpose?

“The Debatable Land”

Nevertheless, he set his mouth and knocked on the familiar door.

The Superior was pacing the room, as his habit was. It was a long, gray-walled room, containing a few chairs, a picture of the Annunciation, a writing-table with a crucifix over it, a bookcase with, by Gard's frequent counting, one hundred and twelve books, leaving out the controversial pamphlets. It was flooded with light from three large windows. The floor was uncarpeted.

Gard entered on the subject promptly.

“I've found I can't take the vows, father. I'm afraid you'll never forgive me.”

The Superior stopped short; a spasm of pain crossed his face. Gard thought, “Now it's coming.”

“Do I seem to you unforgiving?” he said, sadly. “Do you know, that sin of mine was pointed out to me thirty years ago, when I was your age. I imagined it was conquered. I'm afraid I have not watched for it of late years.”

Gard was dumb with surprise. The Superior resumed his pacing.

“I have been hoping that you would come to me in this way of your own will. You will

“The Debatable Land”

think it best, then, to leave the brotherhood—at least for a time? Have you any plans?”

“I would play in some church, father. There is Fritz Moselle.”

“Moselle? Yes, your teacher. A curious instance. I remember him. Made up of a thousand fragments, shivered pieces of glass, from what have been faiths and systems of philosophy, and have had, perhaps, in their time a certain fragile beauty. He probably uses such terms as ‘art’ and ‘cosmopolitanism’ in connection with it. A curious, modern type. You will learn by observing such.” There was a pause. Gard began to collect himself.

“When I said for a time,” went on the Superior, “I meant that my hopes and your issues are in His hands, where they belong. You will write to me if you are in need.”

He stood still a moment.

“There is one result of experience for one soul and another for another. ‘As often as I have gone forth among men I have returned home less a man,’ saith St. Thomas à Kempis; but the spirit of our time does not speak in this way. I suppose”—smiling—“it is only the

“The Debatable Land”

young men who really hear what the spirit of the time says.”

He put his hands on Gard's bowed head, and there was a long silence. Then Gard stammered something, and presently—somehow—got away and stood in the corridor alone. His eyes were full of blinding tears, and yet there was a sense of wild relief. The interview was over, and he had never seen the Superior so mild, so politely talkative.

The parting with the rest of the brotherhood was more of an ordeal. Brothers Andrew and Francis kissed his cheek and turned away. It seemed to him they looked suddenly old, and gray, and broken.

The cold, white corridor was full of ghosts of his own past hours and days staring reproachfully. He passed out through the cloister court, carrying his little bundle under his arm. The asphalt was wet with the mist. Francis's flower-bed had only a few crooked, brown, uncannily-shaped stalks, like dry mummies' hands thrust through the mould and clutching blindly. He opened the door in the brick wall of the court. The hinge was worn and the gate had been sagging lately. It grated as he closed it behind him.

Chapter VII

Introducing Moselle and Mavering

IT was yet early in the afternoon. There was a hint of the sun overhead, a semi-luminous space in the thin mist, though the pavements were still wet. The two opposite currents of flowing humanity on the avenue mingled and jostled and dodged, with haste and with leisure, with good-humor and petulance.

The avenue as far as Trinity, and Gard in his black robe, knew each other very well. The policeman had nodded to him kindly for years, and of late had taken to touching his helmet. The avenue did not appear to see anything peculiar about him now, but it came to him with a shock, so that he knew of a certainty that the relations between them were quite changed. The policeman touched his helmet, the man at the newspaper booth his hat, but that was a mistake. Properly, he ought to stop and tell them it was a mistake, that he had put off consecration, declined reverence, and cast his

“The Debatable Land”

lot with them and the avenue's democracy.

The sexton of Trinity was sweeping the steps. He took off his cap when Gard stopped to ask him where Moselle lived. “Two streets up, riverence,” he said, “an’ turn to your left; number sixty-seven, on’y it’s rubbed out, riverence. Is it a bit o’ music you’re carryin’, sor?”

Gard found where sixty-seven was rubbed out on a street door, and under direction climbed three narrow flights, to a narrow, top-story hall, with a skylight overhead and several doors, one with the grimy card of Fritz Moselle tacked upon it. He knocked. “*Herein! Come! Vell, du lieber Himmel! It’s de lil’ anchorite!*”

The room which Moselle came storming across seemed to have been originally three rooms, but the partitions had been mainly cut away. There were two pianos, and two grates for coal fires. Floor and chairs and tables were a welter of sheet-music, beer-bottles, steins, books, flower-pots, cats, pipes, newspapers, and rumpled rugs. Moselle came through it like a loose meteor, bent on breaking chaos into smaller fragments; hair brushed back and yellowish, dingy with age, eyebrows

“The Debatable Land”

and mustache that swelled and dropped like cataracts, weight to threaten floors, huge, fat fist, and porcelain pipe in mouth. He hugged Gard to his mighty belly, muttered and puffed hoarsely, and pulled him across the room to where a man in black had risen from his chair, who had a long jaw and aggressive chin, shaven bluish, a slouched hat on his head, a frock-coat, and was tall, gaunt and bony. He held out his hand.

“I’m glad to know you, Mr. Windham,” he said, in a deep, drawling voice, with a certain winningness of smile.

“’Tis Shack Mavering. He knows about you, *kleiner*,” cried Moselle, boisterous, explanatory. “’Tis a friend of Mephisto, der Faust-devil, und of me. Ha! Sit down. Vat iss dat?” pointing to Gard’s bundle.

Gard dropped his bundle beside his chair. At the brotherhood was orderly calm, thoughtful silence, cool, clear walls, and whispering sound of slippered feet. Moselle at organ lessons in Trinity had never seemed so loose and free, broad, joyous, unlimited. Somehow Gard felt as if vacant spaces about his soul were growing warm and inhabited. He laughed, and knew no reason for it.

“The Debatable Land”

“I’ve left the brotherhood. I’m going to be—”

“Gott! Vat you going to be?”

Gard laughed again.

“I thought you might know, and if you did you’d be sure to tell me.”

“So!” Moselle’s face, when it dropped vivacity and took on gravity, fell into rugged, powerful lines. “Got no money?”

“No.”

“Nor clothes of a human too much, nor plans, nor friends but old Fritz, nor knowledge of perversity? Good! All good! You will stay mit old Fritz some veek or more, und I vill get you a church-organ to play somevere. Good! *Hein?* Shplendid! Shack!” — gesticulating over Gard—“look you at his head, his eyelid, his shape of der hair-line. Vat? It is supersensuous Florentine, und de back of his head is Yankee, und so hard you not break him mit an axe. I say in all human variety is law, und device, und chain of causes, und you are mitout science to know not music itself haf more severe und mathematic system. Dat boy is at de end of his shtring of causes—at de end of his shtring. Ha!”

“End of his rope is the idiom,” said Maver-

“The Debatable Land”

ing, in solemn bass. “It means he’s down on his uppers. You’d better attend to me and learn pure English. Your English is composite, mistaken, and slangy, and you are, in body and mind, an epitome of gross fatness, whom no science of human variety could classify.”

The depth and solemnity of his voice, the funereal gravity of his long face, seemed burlesquely classical. His speech was flowing, and composed of structural sentences. Moselle waved his pipe joyously.

“*Continuez*, Shack! Heet her up! Advance! Boy, I gif you a lil’ pipe and a lil’ beer, but not much, um so you be not sick. My friend Shack is eloquent und foolish. Und ve tree vill talk now till to-morrow is gray.”

The talk ran on. Already Gard seemed to himself not merely an hour, but days, weeks—a period which the clock could not understand or measure—away from the brotherhood. The country of ideas into which he had come was a loose republic, where no man knew the limits of his personality or his daring. He might loosen his belt and shout, if he chose. Here conversation was erratic and glancing, not necessarily an exchange of what one really

“The Debatable Land”

thought; and yet, however obliquely from his meaning one spoke, there seemed to be less misunderstanding than among the brothers, with whom the guiding of the tongue to simple truth was a matter of searching conscience. And again, at times, both Moselle and Maverick would say things that seemed to Gard to meet the fact or question before them with a sharper recognition, a more instant candor. He admired and laughed in pure joy of the brave, new world that had such creatures in it, with unstraightened ideas that were free to dance in the sunbeam or dig in the mine, and forget whether they had or had not any connection with the soul's salvation. It was a kind of renaissance for him, a discovery of humanism and the pagan pleasure of mere living with vivacity of body and mind. Here on the threshold of his new life were two to greet him who were witty, kind, ironical, experienced, and seemed to be without care or fear. If, as Moselle had implied, there were something hard and critical in the back of his head, some reserve of judgment, something not plastic and receptive, but resistant and decisive, it did not trouble him now with criticisms or decisions, but let him bask and admire.

“The Debatable Land”

“Dey want an organist in Hamilton. It is Saint Mary’s, a church Protestant Episcopal, called High Church, *videlicet*, protesting mit apologies, und cultured to beat de band, vich is an idiom obscure, my friend Shack. Vat band?”

“Brass band.”

“Ach so! Vell, vat did I mean?”

“Your German mind was headed right, but went astray on a by-path of idiom. Saint Mary’s culture is not in competition with a brass band in blue uniform, but aims at the highest orchestral and surpliced effects.”

“Vell, a choir committee wrote me, anyhow, und I loss de letter. *Helas!* I loss everyt’ing—my reputation, my bes’ friends! I put ’em somevere und forget ’em. Vat did I do mit my letter?”

“I suppose it’s in your pocket.”

“Gott! So it is! Vell, dey vant an organist, und Saint Mary’s—”

“Has a three-banked organ, and Hamilton is a sleepy place, good for your neophyte to sit down in and learn the alphabet of humanity. I know Saint Mary’s.”

“Ach! Plazes! So you do!” Moselle stopped short and looked at Mavering under over-

“The Debatable Land”.

hanging, yellowish eyebrows. “Am I intruding—roping in your domestic circle, Shack?”

“I think likely. It’s no circle. It’s an incommensurable ratio. You know that.”

“I know no more than you like, Shack,” said Moselle, gently. “You haf no objections?”

“None at all.”

“Vell,” said Moselle, after a pause, “so it is.”

“Mr. Windham,” said Mavering, flowingly, “nature cast me for the part of the villain. She gave me the countenance of one reflecting darkness, a voice unfit for lighter remarks than ‘I will be revenged!’—made me a lean and hungry Cassius, and bid me assassinate and betray. The inspired text has it that ‘All the world’s a stage.’ It follows that every man is cast for a rôle, and if he tries to introduce anything not in character he appears to make a mess of it, the management docks his salary, and the public blights his career. I once tried to play a hero and a lover, and invited the conjunction of happy stars. It was no good. The notion of it, as you see, is causing this German monster to make a braying ass of himself.”

“Ho! Ho!” Moselle chuckled, and puffed.

“The Debatable Land”

“Der *kleiner* don’ know your stage und your Shakespeare. He shtare like a house afire.”

“Oh, that’s it.”

“Vat is dat, Shack, a house afire? An idiom extravagant, confusing.”

“It means he stares with breathless expectancy, with bewilderment and fear. I don’t recommend the figure to your use. The conception of red conflagration and fire-bells is a Shakespearean flight, and you can’t handle combination figures. You stick to a simple retail line of business for cash or you’ll bust. You can’t take risks and thirty days’ credit for a meaning. The English language has no confidence in you. You aren’t sound for the market. Mr. Windham, you will probably meet in Hamilton a Mrs. Mavering, who lives close by Saint Mary’s, and who will say nothing whatever of me. If I were you I would cultivate her acquaintance, but imitate that particular reserve.”

“Vell,” said Moselle, gently, “das iss good, but don’t fill de *kleiner* mit bevilderment. He don’ understand, und he take indigestion. Go buy de grocery und de beer, Shack, und ve make a dinner here, und to-morrow de *kleiner* shall haf human clothes, und go to the theatre

“The Debatable Land”

und see friend Shack arrested for his vickedness in de fif' act.”

After a while the dusk began falling. When Mavering came back with bundles and a basket containing a hot shoulder of meat from the baker's, the long room was lit glimmeringly by a lamp or two. And Moselle declared finally, and referred especially to the beer and seasoned cheese, that he was in favor of the animal half of man.

“He develope his soul too fast. Let him wait, let him wait. For his shtomach und feet haf stood by him, his friends from old, so old, und maybe his soul don' do so. She act frisky, *hein?*”

Mavering said, “I'm something of a conservative myself. Man ate before he prayed and loved the way he ate, but we live in a radical age.”

Then Moselle played dream music, with fluffy, floating things in it, on one of the pianos, as though he never ate anything heavier than lettuce, and was, in the verity of music, a fair maiden who walked in a green-and-white garden and was pure and slim as the lilies; a woodthrush in the distance sang a love song that was like a hymn, but never came into the

“The Debatable Land”

garden, and finally each lily became the spirit of a lily, the woodthrush the memory of a song, and garden, maiden and all went up a silver moonbeam to the moon.

Moselle played on through the evening, and towards twelve Maverling rose and left. Half an hour later Moselle swung around on his piano-stool.

“Shack gone? *Kleiner, kleiner!* your eyes are full mit damp shleep”; and he looked at Gard with his own eyes, grave and old and calm. “I denke you are more lofable als lofing, *kleiner*, an’ for an artist de first ’s nodding, de last is all. ‘*Geliebt und gelebet.*’ Aber one must *lieben* in order to *leben*. ‘*Geliebt und gelebet.*’ Ach! I haf so.”

Gard slept in a room at the end of the hall, woke in the dawn, and lay waiting for the bell before matins. Then he remembered, and laughed aloud. But a throng of memories rose reproachfully. The chapel organ would be played badly now; Francis would drone all day in the schoolroom, but there would be no one for him to talk with about Cicero’s beautiful adjectives; Brother Andrew would pat himself on the back of the hand, look wistfully down the corridor, trot away to

“The Debatable Land”

the refectory, and find the salad uninteresting.

So Gard became organist at Saint Mary's in Hamilton, in the fall of '55, and in time a noted young person. In the immediate years that followed, the old life came to seem hardly more than a vivid dream, or a story told him by another man who had never left the brothers, but was still playing for offices and hurrying along white corridors. He had time on his hands, and read eagerly, and his rooms grew littered like Fritz Moselle's. He hardly knew what he was himself, except a kind of highway, along which the thoughts of other men, and emotions that he might claim his own since they came from nowhere in particular, travelled hastily. It was something additional to that sense common to humanity of existence as a hurried journey from the unknown to the unknown, his ignorance of his antecedents back of the Foundlings' Hospital. Yet he seemed to feel no curiosity about them. They had no claim upon him, those antecedents, and he had none to them that he cared to put forward. The past might bury its wrecks if it could. His name might be a clue, or it might be the

“The Debatable Land”

effort of an inventive or reminiscent nurse. He never inquired and never knew, then or thereafter, but was content to have and possess it, as something that had floated ashore with him and served well the purposes of a name. After all, the mortal millions have their severance from each other ruled with not so great a difference in point of isolation, and with the same “salt, estranging sea.” Each is for himself the centre of things; the currents of the deep swing round him; he is alone with his main issues.

Gard saw a place and repute slowly forming for him, and had almost come to see himself a citizen of Hamilton, the straight road of a quiet life stretching before him under a cool gray sky. Moselle, whom he went down into the greater city to see now and then, doubted that outcome.

One night in January he came down Charles Street towards the church. He had fallen into the habit of playing an hour or two in the latter part of the evening, and people in the neighborhood had accepted the custom. Some formed habits of their own to meet it, and went to their windows regularly about nine to hark whether he played that night. It was not an

“The Debatable Land”

agreement, but the silent adaptation in close communities of habit to habit.

The snow was falling, blown by a keen wind, and the great side window of Mrs. Mavering's house glowed warmly through the sharp, slanting lines of the snow. It occurred to him that he would rather talk to Mrs. Mavering that night than summon only spectral visitations from Saint Mary's organ. At that moment Helen clung with warm fingers to Mrs. Mavering's hand, saying, "I shall call you Lady Rachel, because you're beautiful."

Chapter VIII

Of Mrs. Mavering, and of the Philosophy of the Individual

HELEN put her forehead against the cold window.

"It's snowing. Do you think he'll play to-night? But he would if he knew we wanted to hear him, wouldn't he?"

"If he knew that we knew he knew it, he probably would."

The fire glowed and snapped, and reflected its varying mood on the andirons and the red-and-white tiles of the fireplace. Mrs. Mavering, garmented in black and dusky red, lay back in a deep chair, and the firelight played across her face and dress in a more subdued manner than on the tiles and andirons, as if it felt that was not the right place to be familiar and reckless.

"Why?"

"Men take great pains to be nice to us if they see their sacrifice is in the way to be ap-

“The Debatable Land”

preciated. They would rather have the sacrifice appreciated than the service. Oh, it isn't like that, dear eyes!—not nearly so solemn!” Helen had come and curled herself at Mrs. Maverig's feet to consider this proposition. “If you always look at me so you'll frighten me out of all my little cynicisms, and I think them pretty.”

Mrs. Maverig reminded one of something costly, like a vase upon which some master-workman had spent himself, careless of time, considering only line and curve, and how it might be made to glow from within and be more than worthy of the palace of the king; and as if afterwards, when the palace had been sacked, and fallen with ruin and wailing, and the vase had somehow escaped destruction, it had come to stand in the guarded corner of a museum. In this meaning Thaddeus had spoken of her as something to be seen rather than some one to know. Thaddeus's social instinct was quick, and sometimes accurate. He need not have been so mistaken, understood as implying the general facts of a period in Mrs. Maverig's life.

Helen demanded personality even of things. She inveterately accused persons of being

“The Debatable Land”

persons, and brought them to her judgment bar to account for themselves. Thaddeus thought Mrs. Mavering should be looked at for art's sake, for the improvement of the tone of society; that an official sign, so to speak, was somewhere at hand, warning that no one was permitted to touch her humanly.

Helen had not seen the sign. They had met first in the dark and had been introduced by a sigh, and she had never been aware of the barrier with which Mrs. Mavering was observed to be surrounded. Only Mrs. Mavering was given to riddling. She acknowledged herself a person to Helen, stormed by her headlong admiration, but she never accounted for herself at the bar, or, as Helen stated it, “Whenever you say something, and I ask what you mean, you always act as if you didn't like what you meant, but you never say what it was.” So far as our sayings come out of ourselves and ourselves out of our experience, if part of the experience were such that we wished to fly from that part of ourselves and could only flutter the more about it, supposing this to be Mrs. Mavering's case, her impulse to dodge Helen's bar of equity might be understood—and the fact, too, that she found herself

“The Debatable Land”

ever provoking an arraignment. Helen had to dismiss case after case for lack of evidence, and because the defendant wanted to play something else. So that she only wondered now what Mrs. Mavering meant by “Men would rather have the sacrifice appreciated than the service,” and whether one would naturally become difficult by being ten years older.

“I shall call you Lady Rachel, because you’re beautiful,” she said, and the organist of Saint Mary’s stood outside the while and thought he would rather talk to Mrs. Mavering than call spectres from the peaks of his gilded organ-pipes that blown, desolate night.

Of course, one could not become beautiful like Mrs. Mavering — not in a hundred years. One’s nose would not become straight, one’s hair black and heapy, nor eyes change from gray to amber and brown; and in order to become as difficult it would be necessary to be married and have one’s husband become unapparent without becoming dead. Mrs. Mavering was an arduous ideal. Helen doubted that she would ever achieve it.

“Then I must call you Sir Helen, because you’re such a valiant knight, and always

“The Debatable Land”

charging something, and driving a spear into the middle of an idea, as if it were a dragon. But my ideas are not honest, so they have no middles, and it only makes them look mussy.”

“Then,” said Helen, quickly, “if I’m a knight I choose to be in love with you. You’re locked in a tower and I’m after an ogre, only I don’t make out very well what he’s doing. Of course, he growls and rages.”

“I dare say he does.”

“Well, then, Saint Denis Montjoie! It is a beautiful fight.”

Gard was announced and presently came in. Mrs. Maverick said:

“Can you play a game? You haven’t met Miss Bourn? She is pursuing an ogre around a tower. I am locked in the tower. She doesn’t care whether I like being rescued or not. She isn’t sure yet about the ogre, but thinks she needs one.”

“I am a humble person; so is an ogre, isn’t he?” said Gard. “Maybe I’d do. An ogre ought not to be proud.”

“But he always is,” said Helen, eagerly. “He keeps a tower to be proud in.”

“Where is my tower, then?”

Helen hesitated. She had never seen him

“The Debatable Land”

near before. He looked a little singular, not quite like other people, a little weary and very white-faced, a little impenetrable. She remembered all he had said to her through Saint Mary's organ, things sensitive and intimate.

The process of putting together two groups of impressions to make one personality is difficult, and one ought to have time. But he insisted on knowing where the tower was. “I don't know how to be an ogre without it,” so that she said, hastily, “You must have one in the organ-loft,” and was not at all sure that it meant anything, if it were not an entire mistake, and was glad when they sat down without calling for more explanations. She slid down to her old place by Mrs. Maverig and half listened to them, and half studied a problem, to see what was honestly true about it, or whether it had any middle.

When Helen was little, she used to compose parables and sermons, and sometimes wept to think how beautiful they were, and declaimed them to her mother, who had only one comment to make. It was, “Why, Helen!” Such was the parable of the Perfect Cat, who lived a life of absolute sinlessness. There was a sermon on David and Absalom — “Oh, Absalom,

“The Debatable Land”

my son!” It was tearful at that point. But the moral was that Absalom was hung by his hair—a sorrowful incident. People should not make their children have long hair. “And I have asked you three times to-day, ‘Mother, please, may I cut it off?’ and you just said, ‘Why, Helen!’ and I’m not going to ask again. I’m going to put you in the closing prayer.” So that now she put her conclusion into a sermon, to the effect that every one had a tower in which part of himself or herself was a proud ogre, and another part was a valiant knight who ought to eventually thrust a lance into the middle of the ogre to make him humble and social, or else dead, so that both together might become a perfect character before the benediction. Because a proper sermon was like a story, inasmuch as in the first part you made things look as badly as possible and talked about wickedness, so that everybody might become interested; and in the last part you talked about goodness and made goodness succeed after difficulty, so that everybody might become calm; and in the benediction you told everybody to be happy ever after.

“Do you read Emerson,” Gard was saying to Mrs. Maverick—“the Massachusetts lecturer?

“The Debatable Land”

He says, ‘The Eden of God is bare and grand’; but I don’t see anything more than a personal fancy in that. Anyway, the poets would be wrong in putting music in such an Eden. An organ is full of sin and sorrow. The pipes always seem to me to hold so many human emotions compressed and stowed away, like the genius in Solomon’s bottle. Say one of them is a pure aspiration and one of them a snarling desire. You set the snarling desire chasing the pure aspiration, and you have one of the simple formulæ for expressing humanity. It isn’t Eden.”

“Oh, that’s like my knight and ogre!” cried Helen. “Do you do sermons and parables? But you have the wrong one running away.”

Gard looked surprised, and then laughed. “It was all going on round and round a tower, wasn’t it? And if the tower were small you couldn’t tell which was running away.”

“But *they* would know!” said Helen, triumphantly.

“But they might differ, or they might forget, on account of going so fast. Then they’d have to stop and ask the lady in the tower to straighten them out.”

Helen looked puzzled, felt that the parable

“The Debatable Land”

was too mixed to mean anything now, and suspected Gard of mixing it frivolously.

“The lady in the tower is too dizzy, you both run about so fast,” said Mrs. Maverig. “But she thinks Helen would never run away.”

“There’s no chance for me to be proud in this tower,” said Gard, and Helen murmured:

“It’s all mixed up.”

“Music, after all,” said Gard, breaking a few moments’ silence, “leaves you unsatisfied at your strongest. It is misty emotion. It has wings, but no feet. You seem to want something that has more grip and bite.”

“That is heresy from you,” said Mrs. Maverig.

“I’ve made a creed of heresy, you know. That Massachusetts lecturer preaches the creed, ‘Every man his own issue, for conformity is death.’ But I don’t know whether he has said that conformity to the forms you have made yourself is as much death as conformity to those made by other men. I call myself a musician, and something keeps asking me, ‘Is that all?’ It seems to think it time I called myself something else.”

“Then why not call yourself a still better musician?”

“The Debatable Land”

“Of course, one needn’t stand still altogether. You become more skilful with your fingers and feet, and learn better how to render and interpret the emotions, musical ideas, more or less eccentric crotchets, of other men, the best of them dead. Their emotions are not so important, are they? Haven’t we eyes of our own to see that grass is green? Oh yes, we compose. Have you seen my new book? It consists of a prelude, that is very bad, and highly praised by competent critics in journals; an offertory, in which Charity appears as despondent of the results of the collection—I’m conceited about that piece—and a symphony in five movements, which is a padded invalid. Room enough for improvement, you see. I might learn to symbolize a mood more accurately. It wouldn’t make the mood any less futile. The point is really that it doesn’t get you out of a rut, if you make the rut even a very good rut of its kind. The more you dig at it the deeper it grows. There is too much that you never see and never know. You take the shape of your mould. Do you know Dr. Holmes’ ‘Chambered Nautilus’? The nautilus made a larger shell for himself every time he changed, but the poet didn’t comment

“The Debatable Land”

on his making each shell of the same shape as the last. He was a stale conformer after all, that nautilus.”

“Do you think he would have done better if he had tried to make a shell for himself like an oyster’s or a crab’s?”

“He wouldn’t have done better in the matter of shells. But personally he would have gone up the scale of intelligence.”

“He would have been very uncomfortable.”

“Oh, it wasn’t claimed that conformity was not comfortable. It was only said to be death.”

“Didn’t the nautilus have a very beautiful shell?” Mrs. Mavering spoke in a low voice. “If you ask me, I don’t think human life is better than music. I think music is the better of the two.” Gard seemed mutely to understand her, and was silent a moment as if to let the shadow pass, then said:

“Music is a little like the nautilus-shell, isn’t it?—the venturous bark that flings its purple wings in gulfs enchanted, and all that. But isn’t ‘all that’ rather a foolish thing to do forever? Purple wings in enchanted gulfs—it’s a narrow experience when you come to think of it.”

Gard rose to go, but stood a moment looking

“The Debatable Land”

at the two, as if he wanted to fix the picture of them and carry it away; of the woman with heavy hair, in a black-and-red dress, who gave the impression of wearing jewelry and really wore none, and the girl in white with a blue band at her throat, slim hands that somehow looked so strong, and gray eyes that demanded candor and offered imaginations. The firelight played over them as if it were trying to illustrate the subject, saying, “This is worth while to understand.”

“Do you know there’s a war coming?” said Gard. “Trumpets and drums are in the air.”

After that he went away, and through the blowing storm along Philip’s road to his rooms, which looked out on the law school square. The front room was full of the traces and tokens of the six years past, indicating what the mental life then had been, but not very clearly what result had come out of it all. There were books in number and confusion, as if he did not care for them in a bookish way, but only as mines, clefts, or fissures where metals are sometimes to be found—and if found and dug out, the source has no more personal value. There were some lounging-chairs, a

“The Debatable Land”

desk with a litter of sheet-music and scored manuscript.

Gard's face was whiter and thinner than of old. It was noticeably white, with heavy eyelids, and the peculiar curve of hair-line that Moselle once noticed. One might fancy a trace of the cloister in it, not in anything that could be called clerical, but in something that could be called isolated. If there is manifestation in all faces of the spirit within, it would have seemed to manifest a certain separateness ; as if, having learned in the cloister, at the age when one takes fundamental impressions, that a man is nothing else noticeable than a soul alone, with the eternities watching and the one issue of its salvation before it, he had never been rid of that sense of things, but had only altered his conception of the issue, and so the terms of description and the method of pursuit. This sense of things, of life as a kind of personal adventure, a kind of fortune-hunting after an ideal of self-culture, an ambition for a mental career rather than one apparent outwardly to men, may have sprung from far back in his nature and been of precloistral origin, come slowly of late years to a theory. The peculiarity of his coming, as one dropped out of a darker

“The Debatable Land”

cloud than most men come from into the light of consciousness, may have added to this dim sense of isolation, of adventure, of destiny experimenting more definitely with him, of eternities more watchful. Not that he compared himself in that way with other men. The comparison, if it had occurred to him, would not have seemed interesting, or bearing on the issue. To each belonged his independent adventure; each was at the same time an end to himself and a means to other people.

Such progress and pilgrimage had its own perils, excitements, and new landscapes opening unexpectedly.

The picture that remained in Gard's mind of Mrs. Mavering and Helen seemed to him significant of something—Helen looking up with question and appeal to the older woman, the coloring, the firelight. She had brave eyes, that girl. One ought to see more of women. Mrs. Mavering looked like a kind of imperial exile. He sat down at the piano and touched a key thoughtfully. They signified something, surely, if one could put it into form. He wondered what had become of Mavering. Fritz Moselle was growing apoplectic, and people were talking about war. If old orders were changing, it was probably time they changed.

Chapter IX

Of Estates in Happiness

"IN point of fact," said Thaddeus, "I am proposing a partnership, to be entitled 'The Helen Banking and Brokerage Company,' organized to do business for a commission."

"I don't know that I understand," said Mrs. Maverig, slowly.

"We make investments at interest, speculate in futures, examine securities." He paused, seeking precision of phrase. "It is in terms of happiness. One pursues it — happiness. One sees fortunes in it lost and fortunes won. I find I have spent my own capital. I have to be content with a commission."

But then it was not evident that Mrs. Maverig need be in the same case. It would be poor taste to seem to assume it. "In point of fact," she suggested a hoarded wealth, an unknown, mysterious sum in reserve, rather than even poverty in respect to a future. But

“The Debatable Land”

she might be allowed to express for herself the terms of her profit.

“I think I understand now,” she said.

Her veil had little beads of moisture on it from the damp March wind that blew down Shannon Street in their faces. The gutters were slushy running streams, the elms shook their branches restlessly, as if full of the sweet pains of stirring sap and the coming birth of leaves.

“Acting,” continued Thaddeus, “in behalf of the Helen estate, which I believe, I trust, will prove large, but is, I think, I fear—”

“You think uncertain?”

“Doubtless uncertain. There are elements of uncertainty. And in this matter I must confess myself only a man, a sad limitation, Mrs. Maverig; somewhat elderly, too; and so, one who feels he must husband his slender resources. I fear I depend very much on that commission. I fear the bankruptcy of that estate would be disastrous for me.”

Mrs. Maverig drew her veil closer, and they walked on a few moments in silence. Then she ventured:

“Uncertain, of course; but you spoke of elements.”

“I might mention, in regard to the nature

“The Debatable Land”

of it at present, a certain impetuosity, a determination, a loyalty perhaps a little too inflexible. Flexibility is, so to speak, to have a good portion of one's capital near by for emergencies. I might mention, to speak technically, as a liability, a certain Morgan Map.”

“But that,” said she, hurriedly — “I mean, I know him only slightly, but Helen said—”

“You would wish me to convince you that he is liability rather than an asset.”

“Why not convince her?”

“Ah, but there! Might it not — I have tested, I fear it would, I ask your better intuition — might not the attempt, if made seriously, defeat its end by rousing that loyalty, giving perhaps direction and opportunity to that — that inflexibility?”

“It might.”

Thaddeus lifted a neatly gloved hand, and cane swinging between the fingers.

“To be flexible, to adapt oneself. There are so many doors, it is well not to be too absolutely one kind of key. I have heard a phrase, which appears to be a recent discovery — this phrase, ‘The survival of the fittest.’ It was explained to me, who am not profound, I confess. Dear me, no; nor a reader of new

“The Debatable Land”

books. But I understood it to mean the survival of that which fits, the introduction of order by the elimination of the disorderly, of the—a—antagonistic, and so the final result of a race and a world to fit each other like hand and glove. A happy consummation.”

“But Helen—”

“Exactly. Helen’s ancestors—my own, too; how singular! They cultivated a characteristic—a tendency to martyrdom. I believe a certain Bourn was put to death in the sixteenth century for obdurate persistence in a proscribed opinion. Probably later, in New England, some of them were by their neighbors said to be ‘sot.’ My brother was an obdurately unhappy person.”

“But this Morgan Map?”

“An aboriginal, an anachronism. He belongs in the primeval wilderness with other—pardon me—brutes. His father had a singular opinion of him—a—that reminds me; he had a very singular opinion, very singular.”

Thaddeus mused a moment.

“Mrs. Mavering, will you dine with us on Wednesday?”

They came to the corner of Charles Street, and parted at Mrs. Mavering’s door.

“The Debatable Land”

To obtain a small measure of happiness as a commission for managing another person's estate in the same kind of property! She wondered if Thaddeus were not really a wise man, who made a pretext of frivolity. He seemed to have definite theories of things. It might be his rapid and light manner was part of his wisdom and his theory, as if he had found it the part of wisdom not to look gravely and long at any phase of human life. Who knows what might be disclosed, for all depths are black and threatening. One should touch surfaces and slip away before the depths boil up. If Thaddeus had really attained skill and success, it was something to admire. For herself, she seemed to have failed. She had stirred the depths and had not found them on the whole pleasant.

Thaddeus's house was four-square, of a yellowish stucco, with a raised entrance and a windowed cupola. They built so, and so decorated within, when they endeavored to build decoratively, a half century or more ago; they impressed a generation following with a hunted, persistent sense that in some manner a marble mantel, a plaster ornament on the ceiling, an ormolu clock, a flowered carpet, and china

“The Debatable Land”

figurines with neat stockings, were the types and accepted symbols of earthly splendor. Plush upholstery was a proper thing in Thaddeus's day, and Thaddeus had it. He desired the presence of that which was fit, accepted, not provocative of dispute.

And so his little dinner of five passed fitly. He manipulated Gard to the piano, Helen near by, Morgan in position to observe her, and Mrs. Mavering in position to observe all. He drew his chair near Mrs. Mavering and smiled a wrinkled smile of content. He felt creative with respect to the situation, a strategist who had securely arranged how the enemy should act.

“He will growl,” he said to Mrs. Mavering, softly; “the bristles will rise on his spine. My dear Mrs. Mavering, a primary egotist is an impossible person out of the jungle.”

Mrs. Mavering thought she could see why Morgan suggested to Thaddeus such terms as “primitive,” “aboriginal.” There was something rugged and rough-hewn evident in the first place, a massiveness of antediluvian bone, such as they dig from the clay banks of rivers. “We are all egotists,” was Thaddeus's theory, “but the primary won't do.” He is

“The Debatable Land”

savage and solitary, too direct, too elemental. He jumps to his aim. He does not care, so he gets it, what happens in between. He does not care for minor points. But civilization is a system of minor points. He has no sympathy, cannot move from his footing an inch to take another point of view. Doubtless he will lie and betray, for they are minor points of method, and faith and truth are social products. At least, he will not notice what he may happen incidentally to step on, or what becomes of an opposition after it is sufficiently smashed. “Why,” he asked, primitively, “why should I?”

But Mrs. Maverick thought all this seemed an airy structure, built on a theory which was very likely a prejudice.

Gard was playing something martial, with the shrilling of fifes, the mutter of drums in it, and the measured tramp of feet. He was looking at Helen to see if she knew what he meant, because one liked to look at her, no doubt; it seemed to justify itself; but more particularly because he had fancied of late that her face was a kind of magic mirror, such as enchanters used to raise upon by incantation their pictured prophecies, and that he was become able to summon to it the shadows and

“The Debatable Land”

counterparts of his moods, and watch the brightening and darkening of himself in reflection.

When he would come from the organ-loft, find her with Mrs. Mavering in the dark under the gallery by the stone pillar, and the three go out across the yard to Mrs. Mavering's house, he always found that Helen's interpretations, however wide they might be from his own in point of verbal symbols and form of allegory, followed the mood with accurate detail. Only the mirror tended to add moral judgments, or to substitute the terms, right and wrong, for beautiful and ugly, for harmony and discord, and in that respect appeared to be inaccurate. Still, it enabled him to realize himself with curious vividness.

Helen's face was flushed. Presently Gard became absorbed and looked at it no longer. He was trying to get not merely the sound of the marching, the ripple of the flags, and the elation of the crowds, but something about devotion and the spirit of the nation shining like the sun on the faces of its soldiers. Mrs. Mavering, too, turned from Helen, and noticed how thickly Morgan's yellow eyebrows were knit above his eyes, which seemed to have a

“The Debatable Land”

kind of green glare in them. They were fixed on Helen. A sudden memory shot through Mrs. Mavering's mind like a sharp pain—she shivered. Thaddeus noted it.

“Exactly,” he murmured to her; “quite so.”

Gard found his theme and began weaving it in among the drums and fifes, increasing it until drums, fifes, and flags seemed only like the surface ripple of a deep stream, so grave it was, so large and resolute, so brimmed with its purpose. Helen saw the success and bent forward. Morgan made a slight choking noise in his throat.

“Exactly,” murmured Thaddeus; “quite so.”

Gard finished abruptly and turned to Helen. “I don't suppose it's half true.” He appeared to be continuing the subject, secure of her understanding it up to that point.

“Oh, why not?”

“It doesn't read like it in the newspapers,” he said, and rose presently to go. Thaddeus, too, must run down to his club; would Mrs. Mavering forgive him and stay with Helen till he came back? Morgan took his leave with conventional phrases. And the three having each taken himself and his egoism away, Helen and Mrs. Mavering were left with

“The Debatable Land”

Thaddeus's trim sea-coal fire, marble mantle, china figurines of the neat ankles, gilt chandeliers, and flowered carpet.

Helen took her favorite place at Mrs. Maverick's feet, and said, “Uncle Tad's fires always have company manners.”

As for Morgan, Mrs. Maverick thought, he did not like to see that Helen could be moved by powers that he could not himself attain; perhaps neither knew nor cared what those powers were, only knew that he could not attain them. But Thaddeus's airy structure, his theory of the primitive, did not follow necessarily. Yet she felt that a certain atmosphere of animosity surrounded Morgan; he was either aggressively or indifferently hostile; or else it was because one felt his intention to dominate, and indifference whether the dominance were admitted with peace or in process of war.

“Don't you want to confess, Helen?”

“I'm always confessing, Lady Rachel.”

“But about Morgan Map?”

“Oh, why, Morgan is—just Morgan, don't you see?”

“That sounds like a whole dictionary, but the words don't seem to be arranged.”

“It's arranged by the alphabet,” Helen

“The Debatable Land”

laughed. “It begins with A, when I was born.”

“I was wondering if it went through to Z.”

“Oh! But, Lady Rachel, I don’t think I know what you mean.”

“Has he asked you to marry him?”

“Not that, of course not. But he said he was going to marry me.”

“When? How long ago?”

“Oh, I don’t remember.”

“But what did you think about it?”

“Well, you see, Lady Rachel, I suppose I thought it was too good of him to believe, and I suppose I wondered if he wouldn’t forget about it by-and-by. And do you know, he didn’t—that is, I don’t think so.”

“But, you funny child, you don’t tell me at all. Did you promise to marry him?”

“Promise! He never asked me to do that.”

“Do you love him, dear?”

“Never asked me to do that, either.”

“But, Helen, you dodge like a wild thing. If you don’t love him and he expects you to marry him, you must tell him you won’t.”

“Why?” Helen rumped her hair with swift hand. “There’d be a frightful fight. You see, Lady Rachel”—plaintively—“whenever

“The Debatable Land”

I fight with Morgan I get so—so smashed. Don't you know, it makes your bones sore, and gives you a headache. Besides, Morgan always does what he means to do, and he knows all sorts of things, and if he means to marry me I suppose he will, and I suppose he knows—well, whether I love him or not. ‘My word!’ says Uncle Tad, ‘I don’t.’”

“Don't what?”

“Don't know, Lady Rachel. Suppose I said ‘Morgan Map, I don't love you, there!’ then he'd say, ‘You do, too,’ or else, ‘That's my lookout,’ or something, and what would I do then? Oh, yes, I'd say, ‘Well, then, I won't marry you,’ and he'd say, ‘Much you know about it,’ or if he was cross there'd be a fight, and I never get anything out of that. Isn't it funny, Uncle Tad doesn't like Morgan at all.”

“I don't think,” said Mrs. Maverig, slowly, “that I do, either, but it looks as if I ought not to say so. Do you mind?”

“Of course not. Morgan doesn't care who dislikes him, except me; and if I did, don't you see, it would be only one of the words in the dictionary.”

“I think I begin to see. But I'm still wondering if there isn't one word left out.”

“The Debatable Land”

“Why— But I don’t know what you mean. What makes you so solemn, Lady Rachel? You bother and bother about Morgan, and he’s not so worth while, not so—around in the dark as Gard Windham, who says things out of the middle of himself without talking at all, and you understand him, you don’t know how, and it makes your hair tingle. Lady Rachel, listen! Let’s go to the war.”

“The war!”

“Didn’t you know there is to be one? And Morgan’s going to be a captain, or colonel, or something. He wouldn’t let me, but we’d wait till he was gone, and then I’d only have to fight with Uncle Tad, and I wouldn’t mind that.”

Mrs. Maverig fell to wondering if there had ever been a time when she was like this herself, as bright and fearless; as little conscious or afraid of looming shadows. She thought she had not been quite like this. There must have been less will and more desire of ease. She thought she had loved a better man than Morgan Map, at least one more varied and peculiar, if not so poised and secure of himself; a strange man, restless and reckless. The two did not look alike; Jack was

“The Debatable Land”

dark, long-jawed, and lean ; but when she had noted Morgan knitting his yellow brows, and imagined there was an odd glint in his eyes, she had thought of one of Jack's moods, and shivered. Jack was never jealous. But there was some mark, something common to them both, that sent a searching chill, that seemed like a denial of all close comforts and small loving things. Or was it only her own weakness and fanciful fears, born of those past times when she had learned to be afraid of the next day?

Thaddeus was an airy theorist. Besides, he seemed to be mainly interested in his commission, which perhaps would not accrue if Helen went off with her capital of happiness independently. Searching through her experience, she was not sure how much that she found bore on the subject. It had not seemed a question of courage when she had first girded up her garments and followed where she was led. It had seemed inevitable. Jack's name was the whole dictionary, and there appeared to be no word entirely outside of it. And then the awakening ; a series of chasms opening, the bright world breaking up, and sections of it tumbling down the black chasms.

“The Debatable Land”

She seemed to see his face, with its large, mobile mouth, painted against Thaddeus's fireplace, as he had looked when he had left her that last day in the early morning ; heard his laugh, and the echo in the empty hall of the door that had closed behind him.

“I'm afraid I have had almost enough of adventures. When I came back to live here I was very tired.”

“Are you going to tell me?” said Helen, in an awed tone.

“Perhaps not everything. But you know I was born here, and my name was Ulic, and all that, till I was married. Mr. Mavering came to Hamilton when I was about your age, and I think he was looking for anything that would interest him, but not expecting it would interest him very long. He had a great deal of money then, but he has done all sorts of things with it, and I don't know that he has any now. I suppose he was engaged in what your uncle calls ‘the pursuit of happiness,’ and he seemed to be successful. He got so much amusement wherever he went, and his way of doing it was—some of it—expensive. But perhaps it cost me more than any one else, unless—but I don't know about that. He was very

“The Debatable Land”

clever, and I thought him wonderful. I think he must have been a little extraordinary. I thought no one else had a lover who paid such compliments. He used to say, ‘Life is a joke between God and the devil. You are a bright remark by the former, Rachel, and I am the latter’s repartee.’ He never tried to conceal anything about himself. Then we went adventuring. You see, my story turns on Jack’s being so queer—at least, his coming to seems so to me. I couldn’t like things and people that were evil and coarse, or like being always dragged into the danger of some kind of disgrace. You can’t, if you have been taught to be scrupulous. But he did not seem to see differences between good and bad, and refined and coarse, or else he thought them petty differences. He liked almost anything except being dull. We went from place to place, and across the sea and back again. He was restless—and reckless. I think he was too reckless of me. Once we had a house at New Orleans, where the planters used to come and play cards, and there were queer women with very dark eyes, and some of the planters were quite old men. But one night one of the women killed a planter with a knife, on the stairs.

“The Debatable Land”

Then we got out of a window on a back roof, and through alleys to the levee, and went up the river in the morning on a steamer. I don't know what it was all about—quite. But there were things that happened which I minded more than that. I used to be so tired, so afraid. Then I grew to be afraid of Jack, because I couldn't understand him, because whenever things were very black and horrible, or seemed so to me, he acted more amused and queer, as if it were all a kind of play in the theatre. And he did not grow worse through all this; he did not change at all; but I grew worse. I tried to be like him, but I couldn't. Of course, we knew a great many people, and sometimes were fashionable. Once in London we went to great balls and receptions. But Jack saw some Hindoo snake-charmers, and wanted to be one, and travel about in turbans and yellow cloth. I don't know why we didn't do that, but we came home soon after. And we quarrelled very miserably—that is, I did. Then the Ulics became excited about it. One night, or early in the morning, I woke up and heard some one very angry in the next room. Jack never became angry. It was another man. I don't know who it was. There was a struggle.

“The Debatable Land”

I suppose Jack struck him, and he fell. I crept and opened the door. The window was open and Jack was dropping the man out of it into the area. Then he laughed to himself, and turned around and saw me.” Mrs. Maverick’s voice faltered, and she paused.

“It wasn’t so much of an incident, only it was the last. After he left I began to shiver and sob, and I crept to the window and closed it. I thought he had killed him, but of course he hadn’t. It was winter, and the snow was deep in the area. He dragged the man up the steps, held him by the collar against the railing, and brushed him and laughed. Then he took him away, holding him up by the arm. It was characteristic, for he never bore any person a grudge for any harm he may have done that person. Most people do. He doesn’t bear me any grudge. I came back to Hamilton then.

“Forgive me for telling you my poor story. I thought when I began there might be something in it to tell you particularly, but I see there wasn’t. And really it isn’t much of a story, only a quantity of details.

“I suppose,” she continued, slowly, after another pause, “that your uncle would class

“The Debatable Land”

Jack with the half civilized, or belonging really to a past time, when everything was unsettled and everybody was adventurous. He calls Morgan Map a primary, or aboriginal. I suppose he would call Jack a secondary, or nomadic, and perhaps,” with a little laugh, “he calls himself a tertiary. I wonder if there are any more degrees.”

Helen sat very quietly, drooping her head, and did not smile. Without understanding, she felt as if a hand in the darkness had struck her, as if a vista had opened, and all along it were crouching melancholy shapes and strange fears with faces hidden.

When Thaddeus came back he stood a moment in the doorway, and smiled with wrinkled cheeks.

“You look,” he said, “like Israel by the waters of Babylon.”

Chapter X

Of Spring in Hamilton—Of Thaddeus's Opportunity
to be Candid

IN the open country the seasons are free, and work their will with spacious confidence. There is room between heaven and earth. Spring runs down the back of the mountain forest, and races the river; the heat of summer has reason, leisure, and is motherly of green things; autumn has its cornfields, leagues of yellow landscape, and the progress in cool order of harvest and death; winter its distances and long-drawn breath from the pole. Their functions there are customary, familiar, old. They can swing at large. They need not hesitate. But in city streets they go timidly, as if they fancied something in man and his civil doings not in the original regulations. They are conservative. An innovation was made, not so long ago, in their ancient memories; a creature containing an unknown chemical was developed and introduced. They seem

“The Debatable Land”

to remember that objections were made at the time. It was said, “You never can tell what will come of it.” And you never could. They never became used to or at ease with it. The innovation was even dissatisfied with nature, the ground-plan and mother of them all. He laid out cities to contradict her. He questioned, too, the wisdom of his creation, noted his own discordance, and went on to call his discontent divine.

And spring entered Hamilton. One felt something moist, warm, and sticky in the air, and knew what she was about, trying to make civil kisses out of her fructifying young enthusiasm. her tidal tenderness, and feeling embarrassed so that she made something moist, warm, and sticky. Baby green leaves were on the maples of Shannon Street and on the elms of the Common; rain was on the roofs at dawn, and the gutters flowed all day; busy citizen birds were notable on lawns, strayed songsters gurgling with happiness, or voicing spring longing in plaintive “pee-wees.”

And Hamilton cared little about it. The Third Volunteers and a troop of militia cavalry were camped in the Fair grounds by the end of May, and people sat in the grand stands to

“The Debatable Land”

see them drill. There were rows of neat, new tents, lines of men trying to keep step to a drum, bugle calls, cavalry charges, and turf cut to mud or dust. A blue sky was overhead whose peace was too deep and distant to be known, but one could infer it from the nearer peace of the white, drifting clouds. There was Lieutenant Map, with straps, visored cap, and sword, which Thaddeus thought should have been a club or javelin. “He’ll not be suitably dressed till he’s tattooed.” Thaddeus even pursued and caught happiness in the situation, the changing pulse of the times. There were advantages to society in this panoply and thrill of war, which filled the eye and ear, entertained the thoughts, stirred the feelings to an interested activity. Society became more united, the units more sympathetic with each other. It was not good for banking; but for society, really, to sit in a grand-stand and watch extraordinary affairs go on in which society had such share and interest, was for society in the highest degree, in point of fact, inspiring. How brutal, how degrading, how primitive the Roman arenas! But here the higher feelings were enlisted. One saw battle-grounds imaginatively—their blood and dust idealized, made symbolic.

“The Debatable Land”

Rachel and Helen agreed with him without difficulty. It seemed to Helen quite splendid and natural for Morgan to go to the war. And both thought the cavalry and the bugles made everything real. It was not so long before that one heard there was such a place as Sumter, and even yet the objections made to anybody's firing at it seemed a little difficult to grasp with sympathy. Was not a fort made to be fired at? A little while before they had been told to dislike abolitionists, and had done so. Now they were told to dislike secessionists, and did so; but both were abstract. But here, on the familiar Fair grounds, were visible men in earnest, who were to be shot at and possibly hit by individuals. It was another matter than abstract secessionists shooting at a fort that was not interesting in itself. So that Rachel and Helen waved their handkerchiefs, and Thaddeus rapped with his cane, while the dark-blue lines broke and reformed, the bugles sounded, drums beat, troops of horsemen swept by, and overhead the sky possessed another blue and the drifting clouds a different movement.

They came home by Philip's road. The maples on Philip's road spread leaves that had

“The Debatable Land”

passed from babyhood into youth in the sunlight and soft, damp air. They found Gard sitting disconsolately on Mrs. Maverick's steps, in blue uniform. Thaddeus said, “There's another patriot whose clothes don't fit.”

“I was afraid I'd have to leave before you came,” Gard explained. “I've had a rapid day. Decided at one o'clock to enlist; enlisted at two; told the rector at three I wouldn't play his old organ a day longer; drew this outfit at four. It's five now. But the rector was game. He said if he was twenty years younger he wouldn't preach in his old pulpit any more. May I come in half an hour, Mrs. Maverick?”

Thaddeus settled his glasses. “Young man, I should have said you were too wise for a warrior. Are you aware that cold lead, taken suddenly in any quantity, is injurious to the system?”

“What system?”

“The physical system of the—a—person taking it.”

“Is it?” said Gard. “But it might be a mental tonic.”

They all went in except Thaddeus, who walked down the street, scenting the air with delicate nostril.

“The Debatable Land”

“I don’t—that one—I don’t seem to make him out.”

“You see, Mrs. Maverick,” said Gard, “there are only a few people I want to tell about anything I do—you and Helen, and Fritz Moselle, and some of the brothers. Now, Fritz Moselle will say, ‘Vat for a fool of a musician! Aber, you nefer get so fat as me if you don’ be contented.’ Brother Francis will quote the Anabasis, and Andrew will give it up, and the Superior act like the Apocalypse. Now, what do you say?”

“I don’t know. Every one else is thinking about one thing now. I should have said you would think about something different.”

Gard kindled with the eagerness peculiar to him when on the track of an idea, or trying to state one that was clear to him but seemed to struggle against statement—a kind of tension and nervous thrill, like that of a hunting dog when the trail is hot.

“But going with the crowd is all right if it’s going the way you want to go. And the more undistinguished from the mass you appear to be, the more you can keep a unit to yourself. I shouldn’t like to be an officer, for then I’d be responsible for other men. But a private

“The Debatable Land”

marches where he's ordered, and shoots according to prescription. So he can watch the big phenomenon all around him and feel it racing through his blood. Can't he? I can feel it already. Can't you? Of course. But I want to look it in the face. If a man had a chance to be a crusader in his time he'd be foolish to miss it. He'd miss the flavor of his time. I'd sooner decline the acquaintance of a Shakespeare.”

He looked at Helen eagerly. She stood among the potted plants in the bay window, looking out. He had thought she would seem more interested. She must be interested. Any one who had seen her eyes light up suddenly and often would know that. He wondered what clue to some unexpected significance she was following now, that she seemed absent-minded among the potted plants. Every one had his or her personal solitary adventure. Helen, of course, had hers. One had to remember that.

“I play to-night the last time. Will you be under the gallery?”

Then he went away. And Helen, among the potted plants, followed a clue to this unexpected significance, that it did not seem to her

“The Debatable Land”

splendid and natural for Gard, too, to go to the war. It seemed like the hand in the darkness from Rachel's story, the vista where melancholy shapes and fears crouched and hid their faces. She watched him go down Queen Mary Street towards the Common. Morgan Map, striding down from Philip's road, saw him come out, said to himself, referring to the uniform, "It's that organ player! Who next?"—looked up and saw Helen's profile above the plants in the window, and stopped. A moment later he turned and walked back.

In Saint Mary's, that night, the music did not seem to Helen to come down from choir loft as usual, and talk to her familiarly. She could not make it say anything. It stayed up among the organ-pipes; and below, among the pillars and aisles instead, the wind of a coming storm blowing in through the vestibule doors, half open—for the night was heavy and close—took its place, whispered, moaned, and wailed: "You've no idea how black it's growing. Shut the doors and hide." At least, she was only able to make the music say something about going away, and that "if people never meet again, never is a long, long time." She was glad when it was over, and Gard came

“The Debatable Land”

around and under the gallery. They walked across the yard silently. The night had grown black, the branches tossed, and the leaves fluttered audibly in the darkness over them. They found Morgan walking to and fro in the edge of the light from Mrs. Maverick's window.

“Why, Morgan!”

And Gard saluted, “Lieutenant.”

“I want to see you, Nellie. Are you going home?” Then to Gard and his uniform, “Isn't that rather sudden?”

“It's the latest fashion. I report at nine, they say. Good-night.”

And Mrs. Maverick, mounting her steps, turned to watch Morgan and Helen, and noted that they, too, walked quite silently still, till they turned the corner in front of Thaddeus's house and disappeared.

Thaddeus sat in the little room behind the drawing-room. At the sound of the rising wind he went to the window, looked out uneasily, and listened. The wind was too loud for him to hear the organ, even if it still were going. But he heard the hall-door open, and so went back contentedly to his newspaper, in which it was stated that a certain officer, in bringing a Confederate flag from a hotel roof

“The Debatable Land”

in Alexandria, was shot by the hotel-keeper, who in turn was shot by a person accompanying the said officer. Really, people acted with singular earnestness and energy nowadays. He laid down the paper. On the wall opposite, in the gilded oval frame, was the picture of Mrs. Thaddeus Bourn, not in reality a mythical person at all, and yet there was a certain indistinctness in Thaddeus's memory of her—a certain absence of salient points. She had not, perhaps, been characterized by earnestness and energy. But nowadays—

“Don't bother me, Morgan,” said Helen, impatiently. They were in the drawing-room, not far from the curtained door.

“But we start next week—”

“That,” murmured Thaddeus, “is not, in point of fact, such a bad idea.”

“And now, Nellie, I think it would be better if every one knew what you are to me before I left. I'll tell you why I didn't want it before—”

“It's funny, but you never take the trouble to ask what you are to me.”

There was a silence that suggested threats. As far as Thaddeus could make out she had seemed to speak quite coolly. “She won't

“The Debatable Land”

lose her head. God bless her!” he thought; “but—a—I think I’ll step into this.”

“If you’re going to be subtle,” said Morgan, at last, with a new harshness and blare in his voice, “I sha’n’t understand it. It’s perfectly simple. I want you to tell your uncle— Well, then, I will.”

Thaddeus pulled the curtain and went through.

“I beg pardon. I seem to be referred to.”

Morgan turned where he stood. Helen sat in a low chair before the sea-coal fire, and did not look up or turn her head.

“I should have—if I had supposed the conversation was to be of such a private nature—I should have—a—signified my presence before. As it is, I take the opportunity to observe that your—a—importunity appears to be unpleasant to Helen, to request that you—a—leave her alone, and to state that—a—no engagement between you will ever exist with my consent or her mother’s.”

“It does exist.”

“I doubt it. Have you, then, ever promised to marry him, Helen?”

“I don’t remember I was ever asked to.”

Something like a flame went across Mor-

“The Debatable Land”

gan's face, left red spots on it, and a glare in his eyes.

“Helen!” The chandelier shook with his voice and step. Helen did not move or look at him. Thaddeus raised a deprecating hand. “I must beg you not to shout in my house.” Morgan paused and concentrated. The natural thing to do, the simple instinct, would be, with one hand to crumple up this grinning old idiot—tall stock and curled hair and all—stuff him away somewhere, and carry off Helen into the windy night, with her white dress and blue ribbon around the throat. It seemed impossible, even in an artificial age, that slim creatures should dare to balk him. She stood up quickly, and he caught her closely about the shoulders with his arm.

“It's absolute nonsense—”

“Please let me go, Morgan. I don't want to fight.”

“Tell your uncle you belong to me.”

“No!”

“Helen, do as I say!”

“No!”

Thaddeus pointed at Morgan's arm.

“Will you kindly—thank you.”

Helen fled, through hall and up the stairs,

“The Debatable Land”

a shimmer of white skirts past the hall lamp; and in her room she leaned from the window and let the rain drive against her face. Mrs. Maverick's window threw a great bar into the night. Morgan's voice below seemed to fill the drawing - room, the hall, and came rolling up the stair after her, in muttering pursuit. She gave a half sob, listened a moment, and began to laugh.

“I'm glad Uncle Tad has that row.”

“I remember,” said Thaddeus, amiably, “I remember being —a—rejected once myself. It was unpleasant, very unpleasant.”

“Do you think a thing of seven years is going to be thrown out like this? Do you think I'm a man to put up with this kind of business? Do you think I don't know Helen?”

“I think,” said Thaddeus, “that you don't. My dear fellow, you have made a curious mistake, and yet—and yet quite logical. I am charmed to say, quite such as I should have predicted. You have treated a woman with a certain contempt. You couldn't help it. It expressed, if I may say so, the degree of your culture. Nevertheless, a mistake. Deference, deference — they like it. It belongs to them. It is — a — their accumulated inheritance. Seven

“The Debatable Land”

years—at thirteen—but, my dear fellow, a child! You announce your intention to a growing girl, by whose—a—admiring worship it is received with awe. You suppose she continues to worship you in the same primitive manner. You suppose your ownership and property established, that it merely remains to dictate and receive. How simple, how—pardon me—characteristic! By the way, your father, I recollect, had a singular opinion of you. I am candid, you see. It appears to be your faculty—remarkably so—to invite candor. If I recollect, he thought, supposing you were in some way blown up or ground up into small fragments—some accident, some catastrophe—and then fitted together carefully—supposing, if I understood him, this process repeated sufficiently—you might—but I doubt it—a—paternal weakness. But as to the situation at present, I cannot conceal my—a—satisfaction.”

Morgan glowered under reddish-yellow brows, and Thaddeus talked on with persistent amiability. So grim and forcible looked Morgan, so likely to be summary or primitive in action, that it seemed to argue for Thaddeus a fine trust in the strength of social restraint, his continuing that airy, provocative speech.

“The Debatable Land”

“A distinction arises—a child, a woman. It arose in Helen, no doubt, during her sickness. You observed the distinction, I presume, but only from its effect on you. But, really, you know, it must have affected her. I have, in my time, studied the sex—a subject of delightful interest.”

“I don’t pretend to take interest in your delights.” Morgan had grown cool.

“Quite so,” murmured Thaddeus.

“Go ahead, and enjoy them. I suggest you don’t interfere with me. I want Helen and will have her. There is a bond—”

“Allow me. Has been, perhaps, an understanding assumed.”

“I’m not going to quibble with words.”

“Exactly. Whatever there has been, or been assumed to be, quite clear, no longer is—is no longer assumed. I believe I speak with authority.”

“I’m not going to quibble about your authority, either. You can flutter it as much as you please. I’ll see Helen alone.”

“Not to-night. A—a little flutter of authority. You leave next week? I shall not, perhaps, take the trouble to prevent your seeing Helen. I shall take the trouble to see that

“The Debatable Land”

nothing comes of it. My dear boy, I'm extremely sorry. I don't like you. Your invitation to candor is irresistible.”

Morgan laughed shortly, turned, and went into the hall. Thaddeus followed.

“Really, it's raining. Let me lend you—but a soldier, of course—what a blessing is youth! Exit!”—to the now closed outer door—“exit the primitive.”

And so spring came to an end, with a warm rain murmuring on the roofs all night, soaking down the roots of the maples, driving part of the Third Regiment to sleep in the grand-stands. As in sleeping Hamilton no one knew another's dream, so almost as little by lamp-light or at dawn did any watcher truly imagine another's thought. Who shall escape the dungeon of himself? The policeman on the corner of Shannon Street and Philip's road, when Morgan rushed by him, sympathized with an apparent hurry to get out of the comfortless rain. Thaddeus, before his sea-coal fire, plotted such happy paths for Helen to walk in as an enlightened egoism showed would be best for Thaddeus. Helen let the rain drive in her face, and thought that, “if people never meet again, never will be a long, long time.” Gard stood

“The Debatable Land”

in the middle of his study, looked around him, whistled “The Campbells Are Coming,” and called it clearing up. Books, music, piano, chairs, and memories of meditations—he thought he did not care much what became of them. There was a new time coming, and time it came. “This is no world to play with mamnets and to tilt with lips. We must have bloody noses and cracked crowns.” “The Campbells are coming—trala! trala!” Mrs. Mavering drew the rope of her long black hair over her shoulder, smoothed it on her knee, and thought of the terms “commission” and “estates in happiness.” The braid was thick and glossy. It seemed hard if her own play were quite ended and story told. What, nothing more! Restlessness must come from overbrooding, or the new stir of the times. A woman’s story ended too soon. What a melancholy noise the rain made!

Who shall escape the dungeon of himself, or look from its clouded windows through the clouded windows even of that one which lies nearest, where another prisoner strains to see?

Chapter XI

The Whirlpool.—Mr. Paulus's Reminiscences of Women.

THE Third Regiment went its way. Visibly, it resembled swarms of bees when last seen clinging to the freight cars, or an excited picnic with ornamental bayonets, but to a larger contemplation rather a stream of sea-drift drawn into the suck and roar of a growing whirlpool. Men are noisy and cheerful, and seldom know their own pathos. But the streets of Hamilton seemed empty, though hardly fewer people went to and fro; in the faces of women here and there, there was a certain premonitory desolation.

Helen felt the emptiness to be extraordinary—unexpected; an emptiness between her and the sky; rooms mysteriously disfurnished; things that people said sounding hollow, as if the meaning of words had fallen away from beneath them; Saint Mary's at night became silent and dark, except for now and then a droning service without palaces or towers of sound.

“The Debatable Land”

“To what end,” reflected Thaddeus, “am I a student of human nature in the subtle sex? If she doesn’t miss that antediluvian brute, I’m an addled egg.”

“We’re dreadfully dull, Lady Rachel, aren’t we?” said Helen. “Let’s be Knights Hospitallers.”

“What do you mean?”

“All the rest do is to scrape lint and read newspapers and potter. Why couldn’t we enlist and be nurses?”

“I dare say we could.”

“With white caps and big cuffs? Could we?”

Mrs. Maverick wondered at Helen’s influence over her. She had watched it grow, with a half-amused curiosity. She had thought to be the girl’s guide and helper, and that this new interest would be her reward upon Thaddeus’s theory of commissions. But she had seemed more and more to be following, not leading; as if, in the actual onward game of life, experience, instead of a lamp before, were a lamp behind, darkening the path with the shadow of ourselves. To remember only made one irresolute. It was necessary to be young, or else to forget—at any rate, to be valiant.

“The Debatable Land”

But had she not had enough of excitement, adventure, the ragged seams of things, variety and burlesque, and been soul-sick through it all, and fled at last from its noise and passions? She shook her head, not so much at Helen as at the other side of her own inner argument.

“Collars and cuffs, Lady Rachel! But you’d look beautiful!”

“That isn’t what people want in nurses.”

“It isn’t? But it is! Why, if I were a man, and had you around looking like a remorseful queen who had just hung up her robe and crown on the hat-rack, and was trying to be humble with collars and cuffs, and all that, I’d get well if I were shot criss-cross. I’d say, ‘This world is too fine to leave.’”

“How should you know what you would do?”

“Oh!” She hesitated, and drooped a little. “I think it was Gard said that.” Then, with returned animation: “He was so funny, Lady Rachel. I asked him if he didn’t think you were all that, and he only said, ‘This world is too fine to leave; I think I’ll stay quite a while.’”

It did not all seem to Mrs. Maverig a direct argument to go hospitalling; only it seemed to fall in line with other questionings about the

“The Debatable Land”

fallen curtain, and whether it might not again be raised. One might be content with a minor part.

They went up to Hagar at the end of June, and spent the blue-and-green summer together in the widow's house behind the militant church. Thaddeus came every Saturday, invented new paradoxes, to watch them fall helplessly on the widow's comprehension, and went down the hill after tea in the wide sunset—an immaculate gentleman, with eyeglass, cane, and smooth-shouldered coat—to talk with Mr. Paulus.

“Ain't goin' to get married again, are ye?”

“To whom, Peter? To whom?”

“Mrs. M—Mav—the one that looks like she cost a dollar an inch.”

“Mrs. Mavering is, unfortunately, not as yet a widow.”

“He gone to the war? 'Tain't any more'n reasonable she might get to be. Fine-lookin' woman—looks expensive. Well, I done it three times, an' then guessed I'd quit. I got too fat—don't figure as well at weddin's as I once did. But— Well, I don' no'—the women's got in the habit of marryin' me.”

“Pete,” said Thaddeus, softly, “was not the

“The Debatable Land”

first time, in fact, the best? When one is young!”

“Umm— She was—well, I’ll tell ye. Old Parson Gerry was here then, an’ the candidest man in Hamilton County, an’ I went to him. ‘Who is she?’ says he. I says, ‘Hilda Armitage.’ ‘Shucks!’ says he, ‘she won’t have you.’ ‘She will, too,’ says I, pretty mad. ‘Well, well, I’ll marry you, but she ought ’ve done a sight better’n that.’ But by-and-by the parson and me was both widowers, an’ I went to him again. ‘Who is she?’ says he. ‘Esther Allen.’ ‘Good land alive!’ says he, ‘I was going to ask her myself next week!’ An’ he appeared to think Essie’s bad luck was odd—remarkable odd.”

“I was asking, Peter, for reminiscences of your young romance, tending on to your—a—doctrine of practical matrimony, and so to your theory of—of woman. We were at the point of young romance. May I suggest—the clergyman appears to take up too much room. Hilda Armitage—”

“Well, she was roomy, too. She began to lay on flesh after we was married on credit of a hundred acres of Wyantenaug Valley land, came to her from Patton Armi-

“The Debatable Land”

tage, till she took a six-by-four coffin, she did, by—”

“Pass on, Pete, pass on. Esther Allen—a—the minister’s preference would seem to have argued in her a certain superior attractiveness, a certain—”

“Jus’ so. She argued it that way. She’d never believe but what I knew the week the parson had his eye on, an’ sort of hurried up and got in underhand. ’Twan’t so,” said Mr. Paulus, earnestly. “’Twan’t so. Didn’t know a thing about it till he—”

Thaddeus raised a white hand.

“I beg of you, no more.”

In the matter of light on the “subtle sex,” what opportunities for study had not Pete Paulus thrown away! Mr. Paulus’s drooping left eyelid drooped lower. He heaved with a rumbling chuckle.

It would be not so evil a fate to come to Hagar for the first time, bringing inward wounds to its peculiar balsams. The blue flowers on the green, the lilacs in Widow Bourn’s garden, Windless Mountain, that eclectic philosopher, the deep wood avenues, the league length of the Cattle Ridge, the eastern hills where the

“The Debatable Land”

church spire of Salem village might be seen—one runs easily into cataloguing details, but how convince the inexperienced of their significance, their speech, their daily conversations? Could the children of Hagar tell a stranger the meaning of the mill stream, or ever really explain the moral of the Four Roads? They were not mere objects. They were tangled with living years. One must have seen visions and heard messages. One must have dropped a salt tear by the road-side and sailed that stream to the Celestial City.

And yet it was Mrs. Mavering who seemed to hear the conversations, the meanings, the messages, and not Thaddeus or Helen. Thaddeus was never an instance in point, and Helen was restless. Thaddeus speculated and commented on that restlessness to Mrs. Mavering, who offered few opinions. The impulse and daring which Mrs. Mavering knew as characteristic of Helen's speech seemed to have turned from mental to physical energy, to climbing cliffs instead of merely precipitous ideas. It was as if speech were no longer expressive of facts; as if both were learning an unsyllabled language which the other knew before—Mrs. Mavering learning the language

“The Debatable Land”

of the rocks and the soil, of growing and flowing things, and Helen the language of human living at a point in its syntax which deals with the more searching idioms, the peculiar question at which point is not merely, “What does this obscure passage mean?” but, “What does it mean to me?” The summer days went like water-drops from the eaves after a rain, that gather and shine and fall swiftly, incessantly. September came, where the green garment of the season runs into embroidery of purple and gold.

The wood-path that runs west from the Cattle Ridge road beyond Job Mather’s mill goes by a damp hollow where spotted fungi grow, climbs past bramble patches, clearings, and a bold strip or two of cliff, turns south around a lonely pine-tree, the last of its fellows, down through woods noted for lady-slippers in June, and comes out on the hill meadows along the Red Rock road. You can look south from this wood’s edge past the west shoulder of Windless down the Wyantenaug, and to the east see the range of the Great South woods, and near by the spire of the militant church. But Helen and Rachel came there, as a rule, for the sake of the dominance and conversations of Windless.

“The Debatable Land”

Helen lay on her back, with her hands under her head and knees in the air. Mrs. Mavering's book was thrown aside.

“Do you really want to go?”

“Yes.”

“I don't know but I do. What will your mother say?”

“‘Why, Helen!’”

“And Mr. Bourn?”

“Oh, he'll sputter some. I don't mind.”

Windless lay in the sunlight, genial, wise, sincere, with the girth of high living and the forehead of high thought. One did not have to specify in the presence of Windless. Everything was understood. Yet Mrs. Mavering asked, “I suppose it isn't Morgan Map at all?”

Helen answered “No,” promptly enough, and fell into sombre silence. The eastern slope of Windless darkened in the shadow of the lessening afternoon, while the western only seemed to glimmer the more genially; there was that advantage in being large. “You see,” she went on, “it suits Morgan, fighting and ordering and doing things. Nothing ever hurts him. I don't see why I should bother about him when he's having a good time.”

“It's enough if you don't.”

“The Debatable Land”

“Well, Lady Rachel, then that’s it. I don’t.”

“Then we won’t say what it is?”

“No, please.”

“But I suppose we can know?”

Helen rolled over with a laugh, and hid her mouth a moment in the stubby grass.

“Let’s go home.”

Widow Bourn said, “Why, Helen!” immediately. Thaddeus went with Rachel into the garden, and walked beside her up and down the path between the porch and the lilac gate.

“It isn’t Morgan Map. She doesn’t bother about him at all.”

“She doesn’t? Dear me!”

“But I think it might be better, after all.”

“What is it, then? Why can’t she be contented? My dear lady, my poor intelligence struggles with the subject, but you and Helen—hospitals, drudgery, dirt, pah! vermin. I knew she had the notion. I labelled it properly, ‘Notion.’ I was aware the Helen estate was not returning the—a—interest it should. I admit my commission from it has in consequence this summer been very meagre—most irregular. I believe I appreciate, I strive to understand, your difficult sex—my lifelong

“The Debatable Land”

endeavor—but at present, so to speak, if I may say so, it ‘gets me.’”

“Helen has perhaps more nervous energy than is common.”

“Nervous! But might we not almost say, of late, feverish?”

“Perhaps we might.”

“Then what—or rather, why?”

“If Helen had her secrets it would not follow that she would confess them to me, and surely you would know as quickly as I if she had any. But if I have any intimation you must let me keep it, and only say that, perhaps, it would be good for her.”

Thaddeus shrugged his shoulders, and went down, immaculately, to the post-office to consult.

“Pete, the opportunities you’ve lost to study women! But you might, possibly, say something at random. What’s all this for?”

Mr. Paulus’s face was like the Sphinx’s for extent massiveness and lack of expression, but his left eyelid was variable. He pondered some moments. “What did you an’ me steal pigs for? Did we want the pigs? No. Did we want to see Starr Atherton in his night-shirt? Some—not much. Well, it was a way we had of puttin’ what was in our minds.

“The Debatable Land”

What's in will out. That girl 'd bust out somewhere. If it ain't measles, it's boils. That's what I say. What's in will out.”

Whatsoever supplication or remonstrance Thaddeus may have sent up by himself, he took council of some inward monitor, and did not “sputter.” He had his reward from Helen, who fell into a mood of tentative caressing.

In October they went to Washington. Thaddeus sniffed a few weeks about the streets of the capital, and returned to Hamilton, his bank and club and lonely house, in a state of mind to be expressed by a shrug and the lifting of a white hand in deprecation. In his pursuit of happiness the scent seemed to be lost, the hunt all astray. He realized more than ever how much of his fortune in that commodity he had staked on one issue. He doubted, after all, the wisdom of it, but could not find a way, nor in himself any impulse, to draw back. “The new generation, these new times! They are strenuous, and one grows old.” The air was full of the war; the suck of the whirlpool was felt in every corner.

Part II

Chapter XII

Antietam.

A BIG gun boomed far away in the dark. From nearer came the snip-snap of picket-shooting, which increased to a rattle and settled into volleying. On the hill to the right some one climbed on a gun-carriage and stood vaguely against the sky.

Shadows came running from the door of a barn into the grass. A sleeper cried out and sat up at their feet, rubbing his trodden hand.

"What do you make it?"

"We have no troops over there. They're shooting each other."

"Shooting their midnight dreams."

"Midnight! It's past three."

"How should I know? I was king of the Pleiades five minutes ago."

"Time for trouble to begin?"

"It won't be light for an hour."

"No. Turn in, gentlemen."

Shadows sat upright in the grass and muttered to each other.

“The Debatable Land”

“What’s the Pleiades, Jimmie?”

“Do’ know. Wa’n’t any at home as I know of.”

“Stars, you galoop.”

“That’s what the Johnnies were shooting at.”

“Hey! He must ’a’ been jokin’,” from the shadow called Jimmie.

“Who?”

“The cap’n said he was king of ’em, he did.”

“Oh, go to—”

“Can’t see any stars to-night.”

The distant volleying died down to a rattle—to the crack of a single rifle far away, lonely in the immense night, the encircling silence.

The woods went around behind the hill on the right. On the left a grassy field stretched off in the dark. One knew by remembrance that it sloped down a gradual mile, till it came somewhere to a slow creek with a mud bottom. Outposts lay forward in a thin line of woods. Some one said that the pickets were in an open field beyond, and that some of them belonged to the other side. In that tense, visionary hour one did not conceive of an enemy as of

“The Debatable Land”

separate men, watchful in fields, sleeping in distant woods, but of a creature, a thing of folded miles, crouching, sinister, hostile, with red tongue and bitter fangs, waiting for the dawn.

Some of the dark lumps in the grass were motionless, some stirred and muttered. Through the open door of the barn a group of men could be seen around a lantern and leaning forward. One of them marked and pointed with his finger. A horse kicked and squealed on the hill among the guns. A dog howled in some indefinite distance and direction. The birds began to twitter in the trees of the beetling woods. A creeping wind chilled the dew on the faces of sleepers and watchers in the open. The blackness grew conscious — dimly gray.

Two or three came out of the barn and ran behind it. In a moment there was a cluttered thudding of horses' feet, which died away down the field. Pickets began shooting in front. Little things whimpered and whined overhead. An officer, by the glimmer of his straps, went forward and shouted in the woods. The near firing stopped, or most of it, but the things overhead continued to whimper and whine.

“The Debatable Land”

The lumps on the grass began to sit up and strip off blankets.

“What’s he stopping ’em for?”

“Nothing in it.”

“The Johnnies keep it up.”

“They’re firing high.”

Fires of gathered dead-wood sprang up on the woods’ edge—a score in sight, then a hundred, smoking and crackling. A low murmur, a sense of multitude, grew as the darkness lifted its oppression. Men sipped and munched by the fires. Some one shouted, “Get ready, men!” A cannon belched and bellowed on the hill to the right, then another and another, to a passionate, throbbing roar.

“Company B, forward! Halt here!”

Men poured around in crowds and formed in triple lines. A shell dropped through the roof of the empty barn and splintered some of the boards outward with its burst.

The misty sky was breaking for a clear day. Red clouds of sunrise streamed like pennants in the southwest. A man in the front line pitched forward and lay still.

“Who’s that?”

“I do’ know.”

“Aiken, I guess.”

“The Debatable Land”

“There, now! You jabbed me twice. Hold up your bayonet.”

Men panted as if they had already been running, and shifted their feet nervously.

“To-day’s my birthday.”

“Going to celebrate it all right.”

Several laughed in high, strained cackles.

“What we waiting for, cap’n?”

“Don’t know. Here. Where’s your cartridge-belt? Stay where you are. Who’s that down? Hand up his belt.”

A shout came up the line, like the ripple of a shaken rope. They were suddenly in the woods. Men jumped from the ground and joined. They were in another field of grass. One heard nothing more but the thump of his own feet and the singing blood in his ears; not the throb of the artillery; not the cry of the man who threw up his arms and fell against him; not the discharge of his own rifle, though he saw the smoke, and with the next stride his face went through the smoke.

It was easy running in the grass, the long, level fields, a fence now and then, a stone wall; but then came a slope and ploughed ground, where one stumbled and fell with his face in the brown dirt, and fancied himself

“The Debatable Land”

hit in the pit of the stomach—only, why not dead?—saw the lines gone on; got up, and ran after to the edge of a field of standing corn. A fenced road was beyond, a white building with a central, squat chimney, overhung by heavy woods full of smoke. The lower part of the smoke bellied forward, jumped, and trembled at the edge.

There seemed to be singularly few in the running line now. One seemed, in fact, to be running back unaccountably, down the slope and the ploughed ground, into another triple line, a surf of guns, caps, hot faces, and innumerable legs. One seemed to be caught up and rushed back, ploughed ground and slope, and lined up at the top, there loading and firing across the corn. Comparatively it was restful, mechanical. To find one's cartridge-belt empty at last was a disappointment. It seemed to imply the need of doing something else, something new and untried. The smoke in the woods ahead was thinner.

“I guess Johnnie's belt's empty, too.”

“I guess we're going in to see. Here we go!”

They ran into the corn. One did not feel military—rather, happy-go-lucky. The enemy

“The Debatable Land”

behind the fence and in the road all ran away to the woods, where there seemed nothing much going on. It looked like a gaping mouth, the tree-trunks like black teeth, and the smoke from the blacker throat drifted between the teeth. It seemed to have sucked in its hot breath and red tongue — to be waiting. The fence was nearly reached when it let go a thousand red tongues, a voice that crashed, a breath that was hot and smoky, that jumped and trembled. One dropped behind the fence and felt for cartridges.

“Hi, Jimmie! Going to get out o’ this.”

“Close up, men. Steady there.”

“That’s the colonel.”

“Yep.”

“Draw them off, now. Steady. Close up.”

“Belts, boys—look for belts.”

They went back slowly, stripping the cartridge-belts from men fallen between the corn-hills, and firing at the smoke; into the grass, at length, and at length to a halt in cover of broken fence and line of weeds, hard by the woods they had left at dawn. The enemy spread over the cornfield. One seemed to resent it on account of owning that cornfield with a more than ancestral heritage. There

“The Debatable Land”

were fresh columns coming up on the right. The broken brigades in the grass watched them pass. Their line mounted and stood still on the ridge, outlined against the woods and volleying evenly. Gaps opened and closed. Some one said, “They’re old troops.” They went into the corn with a rush. Whatever happened, it sounded like an explosion of a half-hour’s length, and after it the cornfield and ploughed land were empty, except for the smoke, and the wounded and dead, some hidden in the corn, some seen against the brown fallow.

The mouth of the black woods gaped; there were its black teeth and drifting breath. Fragments of the columns were drawing off to the covert of a bulge of woods on the right. That part of the battle stood still. The sun was half-way up the sky.

“I fought, cap’n! I wasn’t afraid!”

He had red, downy cheeks, an indistinct nose, and white eyelashes.

“Terrible warrior you are, Jimmie. Your fingers are dripping.”

Jimmie looked at his hand. A little red brook ran down the palm. He turned white and sick.

“The Debatable Land”

“Scratched, Jimmie. Tie it up for him.”

“I never seen it,” in an awed voice.

The officer went on.

“Get your breath. See your guns are all right. What’s that?”

The man sat staring at his wrecked and twisted rifle. Another man laughed hoarsely.

“Scrap-iron he picked up.”

“’Tain’t, either”—angrily. “It’s my rifle. Been holding it all day. What’s gone with it? Something hit it.”

It had been shattered in his hands by a flying missile.

Some one rode up whom the captain saluted.

“How many left here?”

“About forty.”

“Colonel Morley?”

“In the cornfield.”

“Major Cutting?”

“All right, sir, over there.”

“How are your men?”

“Pretty fair, sir. They’ll go in again.”

A mile down the valley the fight was growing hotter; a ravine was full of smoke, a jam around a bridge, a line of blue hills beyond; up nearer, columns were massing by a sunken road, under batteries playing from opposite

“The Debatable Land”

hills across the creek; a village lay to the west. The sun made another jump up the sky. The fields around were empty, except for the lines in covert behind the fences, and here and there a horseman galloping, here and there a horse but no horseman. The enemy were in the corn again, shooting intermittently. Smoke drifted up and turned white against the glistening blue. The batteries beyond the woods on the right broke out again. New clouds of smoke floated overhead and dimmed the sun. In the grass-fields still the crouched lines waited in covert of weeds and fences. Hours that had shot past in the charge, the struggle and retreat, now stretched like sleepless nights. Company B muttered and swore.

“What’s the use of waiting?”

“Le’s go in!”

The captain and lieutenant lay at a distance on the grass. Neither of them answered. Jimmie felt around his belt.

“I got fifteen cartridges.”

“How’s your scratch, Jimmie?”

“Ho, I don’ care for that. Why don’ we fight some more?”

The captain said, “Do you hear those minie-balls?”

“The Debatable Land”

The lieutenant, “What of them?”

“The pitch, of course; they go from E flat to F, and then drop to D. That’s a very pretty interval.”

“You’ve got an ear! They do sort of go up and down.”

“Le’s fight some more.”

“Oh, Jimmie, dry up!”

High noon over the corn, and the woods, and the white building with the squat chimney.

Jimmie again. “Le’s fight so— Oh!”

He leaped, flung up his hands and fell—his rifle clattering behind — his head rolled over once and lay still. The man next him lifted Jimmie’s head, laid it down gently and turned away. Some one farther along said, “Pshaw!” One still farther, “Who’s that?”—“Jimmie”—“Oh!”

The captain took the rifle and belt with fifteen counted cartridges and walked down the line to the man with the shattered rifle.

“Here you are.”

Company B was silent, and crouched more closely. The sun slipped down perceptibly and burned red in the smoke. The throb of the unseen guns grew quicker. From woods’ edge and cornfield, from covered lines in the

“The Debatable Land”

weeds by zigzag fences, the smoke was living and leaping, Company B busy and interested. A horseman clattered by. “Get ready!”

“Bayonets?”

“All right. Get into it now!”

Grass-fields, fences, and ploughed ground; all voices of the battle-field awake; yelling and cheering, crash of musketry, crack of rifles, roar of guns, shells that whooped in flight and burst into a score of individual screams. Beneath all, an undertone, a rumbling, grinding, splintering sound, the organ bass of the field; into the corn, that rustled as before, that brushed in turn against Northern and Southern faces, that sheltered alike from the slant sun all still faces in the furrows, pale and ghastly and grimed, thick together, piled dead over dead. Then came the fence, the road, the squat-chimneyed building, the gaping woods with black teeth and white breath; and Company B, Reg. Third, went into the wished-for woods at last, with empty belts and point-on bayonets; went through them, and saw the sun beyond, and broken lines running across open fields. Some thirty of them came back and sat down by the white building gloomily. The captain looked them over and hummed. “The Campbells are

“The Debatable Land”

coming—trala, trala.” The sun dropped low. The throb of the guns down the valley grew slower, duller, fainter. Sanitary men with stretchers pushed to and fro in the corn. The woods grew dark, the fields dusky. Campfires crackled beside the road, Company B’s by the white building. Tin cups were poked into the coals. Conversation was grumbling, fragmentary.

“Jimmie’s shut down on pretty sudden.”

“Jimmie! There’s fifty better men out of this company dropped in their tracks! I don’t see why you’re so cut on Jimmie.”

“I wished it was some one else.” The speaker’s voice broke. “He was such a damn fool.”

“Oh, I see.”

“Know the name of that creek?”

“No.”

“It’s the Antietam.”

“What of it? It ain’t the Wyantenaug, that’s all I care.”

“And this thing’s a Dunker church.”

“You got more useless information ’n would set up a college.”

“Pennsylvania fellow told me over there Dunkers are sort of Dutch Baptists.”

“The Debatable Land”

“Oh, go get some wood!”

The captain was in the road. He walked over and leaned on the splintered fence and watched the red lights of a hundred little fires play ghostly games with black shadows in the foliage of the woods. Men were pushing about in the corn, rustling the blades. The stars were out, the young moon setting slim and lovely with the old moon on her arm. The distant crackle of rifles, belated fragments of the battle, seemed futile, isolated, mistaken and sad in the light of the drooping, withdrawing moon.

Fifty feet away was a large camp-fire of fence rails. Of the men about it, one had lean, long limbs and face, wore a long black coat and black slouched hat, and talked continuously in solemn, flowing bass. The rest listened, absorbed. Now and then one of them laughed.

The captain drew near. The lean talker unfolded his legs and rose.

“Gods! The anchorite? Gentlemen, who might this be?”

“Cap’n Windham, Company B,” said some one.

“He hath grown a beard! In complete steel, revisits the glimpses of the moon! A Hotspur

“The Debatable Land”

of the North, will kill him six or seven dozen Confederates before breakfast and say, ‘Fie on this quiet life!’ Will tootle a reed no more! Will dive into the bottom of the deep, pluck up drowned honor by the locks, and call it vanity! Vat for a fool of a musician!”

“How are you, Jack?”

“A war correspondent I, John Roland Maver-ing, who will celebrate you, a Homer to Achilles, who wants to know for his invocation how you happen not to be dead.”

They locked arms and sauntered along the road in leisurely pursuit of the moon.

Chapter XIII

In Which Appears a General of Division, and One of
“the Brethren.”

IF Gard entered the war, as he claimed, in the theory of a spiritual adventure, it must be hinted that he had sometimes lost sight of his theory. Outside events had shown a tendency to usurp and absorb in the process of the happening. It was not so noticeable during the first nine months. He marched, drilled, felt the rain and the cold wind at night in the open, heard the enemy's guns, saw bleeding men carried by from the distant field, and shared in what was called “the defence of Washington,” a matter that did not seem difficult or exciting beyond reason. He was made a sergeant—a purely outside event. There was leisure to watch the scene, to keep one's poise, to experiment with existence. If at times his old sense of separateness, of isolation among objects, scenes, and persons whose importance to him was only in their inner effect upon him

“The Debatable Land”

—if this sense at times seemed less vivid than before, and the movements of men in masses, the common enthusiasms, made him feel that his solitary journeying was in some mystical way accompanied by watching myriads with the same forward step and shadowy goal, it was rather a passing, a recurrent sensation.

But with the middle of spring came three months of storm and stress in the Virginia peninsula. He came out of the ranks by reason of some inscrutable opinion of him conceived and reported to authorities—something connected with an expedition through a swamp—was promoted because there were no other officers to speak of in the company when the army reached its new base at last on the James River.

He looked back curiously now to the tumult of those weeks, a period when he could not remember to have remembered himself, a long night of irrelevant dreams, the sense of identity lost in the dull confusion, himself going and coming, ordering and obeying, seeing difficulties and finding solutions with a set of surface faculties, the soul within him torpid, at least taciturn. The experience had left him with a sense of distaste and humiliation,

“The Debatable Land”

with a certain troubled doubt. Was a man captain of himself, if he could be seized, stunned, drowned in circumstance, lost like a drop of water in a flood, rendered indistinct to his own consciousness from the flowing, pouring mass around him?

Gard did not suppose himself to be unique. He supposed other men had similar paths to walk in, pilgrim fashion; that every man owned merely himself and his destiny, his issue in the nature of things his own; that to every man there was but one great distinction, it lying between himself and what was not himself. In his own age, at least, he supposed it a growing tendency for men to look within their own souls for the infinite which they could not find without.

There was no doubt the peninsular campaign had been an experience affecting him profoundly. It had shown him what a pit of danger lay on the side of such absorption; that to plunge into affairs so intense, so physical, so powerful in their sweep and pull, was for the individualist numbing, miasmatic, clouding the eye whose function should be to see one path clearly. It had given him a new sense and a certain dread of the strength of

“The Debatable Land”

what lay on the other side of that distinction between himself and the not himself. It had left in him, he fancied, a kind of sediment, an element in respect to which it became illustrated that what a man has experienced is a part of him. It had made him perhaps more consciously watchful of his poise, his mental erectness and control. But the main result so far had been that sense of uncertainty and troubled doubt, as if he had lost the trail, as if much had grown dim that was once definite and guiding. Maverick's appearance seemed to suggest something, a clue or an omen. Jack, at least, was individual, nomadic, and distinct. He never let his surroundings grow into him.

Thursday, the day after the battle, the hills, woods, and fields were quiet except for stray picket shooting. The two armies could feel each other. Why they lay all day so near, so quiet, was no business of either's subordinate atoms. Gard felt that he but barely cared, if no more was asked of him and his remnant of thirty than to stay where they were. No doubt they also serve who wait. He could stretch in the sunlight, listen to Maverick's home despatches, choice, flowing, vehement, and supply him with technical language.

“The Debatable Land”

Farmers drove in on the road during the day, and distributed apples from their wagons, or peddled home-made bread. A number of them wore singular, broad-brimmed hats, smooth hair, long, and parted in the middle, shaven lips and long beards below, and some spoke broken English with an odd, German dialect. They were said to be the Dunkers of the squat-chimneyed church, now spotted with bullet-holes, one casement blown in. To Gard they seemed to illustrate grimly the shaping power of externals, these men whose mouths were set to the line of their wide hats, hair plastered smoothly to mark the even tenor of their peace. They called themselves “The Brethren.” There was something in their faces at once a reminder of and a contrast to the faces he remembered in the Brotherhood of Consolation.

The camp-fires flickered once more at night against the black foliage.

Company B, in a new manner, admired its captain and the extraordinary correspondent, while they recited Brutus and Cassius with mellow mouthings, and after gave impromptu dialogues between a Dunker advocating the use of apples with Biblical extracts, and the

“The Debatable Land”

general of division, explosive, impatient, dropping oaths like solid round shot. Other men left their own camp-fires and crowded the road. Some officers sat on the fence and applauded. The distant crack of the pickets' rifles was sometimes heard, stabbing blindly at the night. The stars were brilliant and the slim moon was in the south.

Friday morning it was rumored that the enemy had slipped away in the night, and gone across the Potomac again; that the general of division had been heard putting violent terms to the name of his chief for committing all the sins of omission which man could commit, seeing his aides' enjoyment of which language he had reddened and set his grim mouth. The fields beyond the wood, at least, were empty, and the village among the hills. One could walk abroad without being shot at from the bushes where those scarlet berries grew.

The crippled Third, with its odds and ends of companies, moved as far as the village, now turned a bustling hospital, and heard big guns booming again south of the Potomac. There it was that Maverick wrote that sketch of red death and amputation which his paper expurgated before publishing, to Maverick's

“The Debatable Land”

disgust. “As fine a bit of realism as was ever done! And look at it, butchered to make a civilian holiday!” He read the first draft to Gard.

“I’ll trade my job for yours, Jack.”

“Quite the contrary”—Mavering altered an adjective in his copy—“you will not.”

A messenger rode into the camp of the crippled Third with a led horse.

“Captain Windham?”

“Here.”

“Order of ———; relieved indefinitely. Will take this horse—report at division headquarters,” and the messenger clattered away. Mavering jumped to his feet.

“I’ll trade you.”

“Quite the contrary, you will not.”

Mavering grumbled and went back to his copy.

“It’s that elegant comedy last night. Poor boy! Ruined! Ruined!”

Gard rode down the road that led from the village to the creek. The centre of Wednesday’s fight had been here, but the fighting must have been mainly on the wings. There were signs of heavy artillery work, but little else. Beyond the bridge was a large house

“The Debatable Land”

on the hill, with a white picket fence around it. From the hill he could look up the winding creek, and see the bluffs, the sloped fields and ploughed ground of Wednesday's charges and retreats, the Dunker church against the woods. Some men in front of the house directed him to take the right fork of the road. The sun was low, the day-moon like a white scallop of cloud. He found the headquarters a half-mile beyond, a small brick house, distinguished by the number of saddled horses fastened at the fence, and within the general, a familiar figure enough, with his red face and white whiskers, a hot-tempered man and well beloved, now puffing a cigar and quite self-controlled.

“Captain Windham.”

“Gentlemen!” cried the general, “will you allow me—I want to see this man,” and they were presently alone.

The general leaned back and looked at Gard critically. He began:

“Captain Windham—mm — these theatrical performances by officers for the entertainment of privates—umm—this disgraceful mimicry of—mm—myself—this disrespect leading to insubordination—”

“The Debatable Land”

“I beg your pardon, sir. It was not intended—”

“I was about to say,” thundered the general, “when you interrupted me, that I don’t believe the commander-in-chief would approve. Personally, I’d have given something to be there. I have about me, I believe, another cigar. Sit down.”

He spoke in a jerky way, coming down on selected words with emphasis.

“I have need of a particular kind of a man. It occurs to me you may be that kind—mm—a certain *variety*, perhaps, of talent. It’s a bit of secret service. *Well*, now look here. It is this. The War Department wants private information about the actual effective *numbers*—if possible—and *condition*, of the enemy—at present. I will tell you more. The estimates that come to it from the commander-in-chief are—I quote the word—‘*contradictory*.’ It is *suspected* that those estimates depend—I still quote—‘on the *impression* that gentleman wishes to make on the department or the public.’ The suspicion may be wrong; or it may be that a change is going to be made in commanders; or, at *any rate*, ‘before issuing a definite order to the present commander’—

“The Debatable Land”

it needs information independent of the regular source. *Do you understand?*”

“So far as you’ve gone, sir.”

“Oh—mm—exactly. That’s right. No doubt it is procuring other sources. That’s no business of ours. I’ve been asked—*confidentially*—to furnish one source—mm— The impersonation of Dunker elders and generals of divisions implies—mm—also I know your record—mm— *Captain Windham*, I am at the present moment guilty of insubordination and treachery to my superior officer. I am also giving away what amounts perhaps to a state secret. I am doing so—for the reason—that your discretion must be relied on, anyway, and you cannot understand too clearly the point to be gained. This information must reach either *me*, or the *department* directly—preferably the latter—and *no one else*. You see the point?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Preferably the latter. I needn’t be connected with it hereafter—would rather not be.”

“I see.”

“Very good. This information should be had as soon as possible. In case you have to send a *message*, this paper contains a code,

“The Debatable Land”

simple enough. The meaning depends on the position of the words. You can apparently mean anything you choose. Learn, and destroy paper. So much for *that*. Your name will be known at the department. You are at your own disposition till the thing is done. There are no directions. Now—one moment—this map. Lee and Longstreet are probably here. Somebody is, anyway. Jackson is God knows where—possibly there. If so, he'll be somewhere else to-morrow. Here's your pass. Any questions?"

"No, sir."

"That's all, then. You may go—mm—Captain Windham—some time I should like to see the impersonation of a general of division in a state of excitement. Hem! hem! Good-day, sir."

Gard galloped through the little village in the dusk, looking for Maverick, and found the fields beyond empty. The brigade was gone, the Third gone with it.

"I can't chase after him all night," he thought, impatiently. "Why doesn't he stay where he'd be useful?"

He caught sight of a horse fastened to a maple-tree up the road.

“The Debatable Land”

Mavering lay on his back under the maple, smoking.

“Get up. Come along.”

“This cigar is the worst—”

“Get on your horse. I want you.”

“What do I care what you want? I was about to say, this cigar is the—”

“Throw it away, then.”

Mavering unfolded his legs and mounted, grumbling.

“You’re the blankedest, most egotistic anchorite that ever petted his soul, not to say dosed it allopathically with wars and red rebellions. One question: Is there any copy in this?”

“Not a word.”

“Just what I thought. Wherever a man goes he finds selfishness.”

They turned into the northern road, clattered past the cornfield and the church. Gard continued: “One of those Dunker farmers lives up here half a mile. I want his clothes, his expression, and his language, and his theology—the whole outfit.”

“Going to steal his most intimate properties. Blanked immoral thing to do. All right, go on.”

“About copy. Anything that goes south

“The Debatable Land”

of the Potomac will be apt to mean a rope for me, and New York papers go south of the Potomac.”

“Egotistic still, but perspicuous. I see.”

“It’s between me and you and the Dunker.”

“And that’s a pretty combination!”

“Not a sign, Jack.”

“Not a misplaced comma, not an agitated phrase shall betray the mystery of this night. Now, then. Why?”

“Oh, you! You’ll have to make me up.”

“And the Dunker?”

“They’re all anti-slave y and non-combatant. Besides, I picked an acquaintance with this one yesterday.”

The small, plain, whitewashed house, with its whitewashed barn, stood close to the road and shining in the moonlit dusk. An elderly man, with smooth, gray hair falling to his collar, shaven lips, and spade-shaped beard, came to the door and stood there, mild, quiet, round-shouldered.

“Can we put up our horses here and pass the night?”

He nodded and turned back into the room without speaking, but left the door open.

They spent the evening talking with him,

“The Debatable Land”

studying the while his outward make-up, his manner and language, critically. He had a certain gentle suggestiveness of his own, and before they parted for the night brought out a pair of saddle-bags and a large bundle of printed sheets.

“De is tracts,” he said, gently, “of religion.”

“Good,” said Maverick. “An ungodly army, no doubt. Oh, I beg pardon!”

“De is not of de doctrine of the bruderen only. De is Christian.”

“Oh, well, Captain Windham was bred a Catholic. He’ll distribute them, and read some himself.”

The quiet elder seemed to have taken a shy liking for Gard. He touched him softly on the back of the hand.

“I hope you are a good man. I hope you are not to die in what you do.”

At daybreak they rode away westward, making a wide circuit of the village, Gard with his lips shaven, hair parted and plastered down, and wearing the gentle old brother’s waist-coat that buttoned to the throat, his dingy black coat and wide-brimmed hat. His saddle was primitive, his bridle-bit rusty. Maverick’s experienced eye judged that he looked his

“The Debatable Land”

part. Even the whiteness of his lips, where the razor had gone, added to the impression of calm and austere withdrawal. Was it some lingering touch of the monastery? One does not live without result during the formative years, secluded between cool, white walls, among unworldly lives. Mavering called him “the anchorite,” and swore the phrase still truthful.

A glimpse of the Potomac between the hills; a troop of Union cavalry breaking camp in a meadow; clank and rattle of side-arms; men gathering and packing kit; men sitting listlessly in their saddles; a mounted officer in the middle of the road, looking down towards the Potomac—large, square-shouldered, and massive. He turned in his saddle.

“Hold on here! Halt!”

Gard pulled up and looked at him under drooped eyelids.

Mavering pushed between.

“Without circumlocution, Captain Map, you’re precisely what I’m looking for. Cavalry’s the thing for a correspondent. I have an unsubstantial vision I used to know you in Hamilton.”

“That’s all right. Who’s this?”

“The Debatable Land”

“Oh, that’s a Dunker brother. Got some blanked tracts in his saddle-bags. Let me join you?”

“Is—is he?” His horse blocked the road aggressively. He kept his eyes on Gard.

“Well”—Mavering turned and surveyed the “make-up” critically, complacently — “I slept with him at his old man’s last night. If a twenty-minute Dutch prayer is any proof, he’s still in the faith of his fathers. I’m leaving you here, brother.”

Gard nodded, rode into the ditch with a face conscientiously blank, mild, non-combatant, and passed the obstacle. Morgan watched him ambling leisurely away in the sunlight and the dust. Mavering waited some time.

“Look here, captain. Did I understand you laconically to insinuate I might accompany and chronicle your glories?”

Morgan wheeled his horse slowly.

“I guess so. Yes, you may.”

The road went around a sandy hummock and disappeared. Gard did not look back. Beyond the strip of the Potomac the Virginia hills were blue and cool and peaceful.

Mavering meditated a disclosure. Still, whether Morgan had recognized Gard, or for a time

“The Debatable Land”

had suspected it was he, or had only acted on constitutional aggressiveness, it did not seem likely in any case that he would chatter about the matter. He could hold his tongue without being warned. “It’s none of my funeral.” Gard had precisely stated what he wanted. Maverick remarked:

“That Dunker had a pass, if you’d asked for it—permit to scatter his tracts wherever he liked.”

But Morgan did not comment. Maverick thought him likely to be dull company, and set himself to making other acquaintance and finding entertainment with experienced skill.

The troop filed out, formed loosely, and clattered south. It occurred to Maverick that they might overtake Gard. Down through the narrow valleys they came at length to the willow-fringed bank of the river, but he saw the broad-brimmed hat nowhere. It seemed to have vanished from the earth. Maverick concluded his connection with it over. New pastures of interest were before him. The nomad owns no real estate in any one else. His soul knows not title or tenure. He will be folding his tent at daybreak and leaving the night’s oasis, and the sands drift over his footprints.

Chapter XIV

In which Maverick Concludes that Cavalry Officers
as a Class Are Eccentric and Deep

THE war suited Morgan. It was action in simple terms of purpose and accomplishment. It was sensible and genuine. There no man's complicated trivial tastes and instincts needed to be bothered about; he carried them at his own risk and exercise; they were not in the army lists. Orders were not disguised in requests and reasons. The gradations and shades, the cautions and compunctions, the ten thousand odds and ends of ten thousand years' accumulation for the most part were swept away in bulk. Men battled with men and threw off their shamming benevolences, showed what they were, and enjoyed themselves in the burly lust of struggle. The life satisfied at least half of him to completion.

A fortnight before the late battle he had seen Helen on the steps of the wooden warehouse, that they used as a hospital and filled from

“The Debatable Land”

wall to wall with blanketed cots. She had looked pale, tired, and smiling. After a moment she had flushed and broken away angrily. And that night he had lain twenty miles off with his troop in the open, a lot of blinking, idiotic stars over him, and could not sleep, and damned in disciplined order the ways of woman and the impalpable barriers around them—Thaddeus Bourn, for keeping his skinny corpse unburied beyond the limit of reason or utility; and Gard Windham to the discomfort of the blistered stars.

There appeared to be another part of him unsatisfied—hungry, rather, and hot on the scent.

Had he not picked out Nellie long ago for her pluck and sense, and a certain tingling challenge in her—a girl fit for his hand to hold? She suited him, fitted one part as a cavalry raid fitted another. Very well. He would take her. Any one that stood in the way would be hurt, very likely; at any rate, taught better. The squire and Thaddeus Bourn might be as futile as they chose, it being no business of his. They had had their day. Let them keep out of the path of men who had still to live. It was no great matter what they did. But

“The Debatable Land”

when it came to Nell's mooning about the organ-player, with his theories and whining tunes, and getting sick in hospitals— She said that she hadn't seen him since winter, which wasn't likely. She had turned red, and broken away at that. Hospital nurse! What a fool thing for Nell to do! Mrs. Mavering was with her, and Jack Mavering travelled with Windham. The Mavericks might have made up. Ten to one there was a game on, and they fancied Morgan Map was that kind of a fool.

The war filled a man's hands. Morgan felt that the germ of his own career lay in these days, and other business ought to wait if it could. Windham must be off scouting in that Dunker outfit, and might by good luck get himself hung, only he was too clever.

Morgan turned in his saddle and looked back for Mavering, who rode in the middle of the cantering troop, and seemed to enjoy himself.

On Saturday, the end of the week after Antietam, the troop rode westward along the line of a railroad. The Confederates had been at it, some of them within a day or two, for the burned ties were still smoking. They had bent

“The Debatable Land”

the rails by heating them in the middle and twisting them around the trees. At regular intervals were black circles of the fires and charred ends of ties. It was too systematic for guerillas.

“There,” said a lieutenant to Maverick, “you can write your papers there are twenty or thirty miles of this, all done under the nose of the chief.”

“A vigilant, aggressive man, the latter, I infer, is your matured opinion,” said Maverick; and the lieutenant replied, dryly, “Something like that.”

The sandy road-bed curved through woods that must have been straggling and discouraged in their green days, and now were black and smoking, for the abandoned fires had spread. The wind mourned through the desolation, and blew thin veils and streamers of smoke overhead.

“And no doubt Captain Map’s opinion coincides with yours in favor of activity and vigilance.”

“He’s a hot-and-cool man to ride with. You might write that we’re on a line which was burned through yesterday or the day before, and just now a lot of hostile cavalry are cavort-

“The Debatable Land”

ing round the neighborhood somewhere, likely to drop on us any moment. We're out to find about this line and that cavalry, and get back if we can.”

“I notice—a point that strikes an artist in realistic description inevitably—that Captain Map is calmly reading something as he rides. Such things illustrate.”

“His nerve? Oh, that's all right.”

“But the artist's imagination proceeds. Reading what? A newspaper? No, a written sheet, which the wind blows about in his hands. Perhaps instructions—or, better, a love letter.”

“Likely enough.”

“They do more than illustrate. They fill in the foreground with humanity against the background of nature and event. You are an army officer, lieutenant, unlessoned, uninspired, unreflective, and may take the word of one old in variety, that the gist of life lies in men and women rather than in event, and that men and women are more worthy of consideration in persons than in masses. The play is played in the foreground, and there is the plot and the crisis and the solution; there the action lies; practicable scenery left and right, prac-

“The Debatable Land”

ticable mob of courtiers, soldiers, or peasants in the rear—and—”

Morgan pulled in his horse and flung up his hand, the white paper fluttering in it. The troop halted short, plunging and scattering sand.

“Enter,” observed Mavering, “a practicable enemy, lieutenant, from a practicable wood.”

A quarter of a mile away the sandy road-bed curved and disappeared. A large body of cavalry swung around it. Morgan shaded his eyes with his hand and the fluttering paper. The troops sat stiff and intent. He shouted and wheeled his horse.

“Left wheel! Hard!”

Whirl, plunge, and shout. Mavering’s horse slipped on the sand-bank, lost footing, and fell headlong into the ditch. Mavering struck the opposite bank in a heap, unlimbered, and came down with his feet across the horse’s neck. He seized the bridle, jumped, and tugged. The troop was two hundred feet away, the squadron a thousand. A white paper, blown by the wind, danced and twinkled along in the sand. He tugged harder, leaning forward, and caught the paper, thinking, “That’s Map’s love-letter,” heaved and shouted. The horse half rose;

“The Debatable Land”

something went “thud” in his neck; he screamed and dropped again. Another bullet whined by Mavering’s ear. He dropped the bridle—“I’m done, then”—and saw Morgan two hundred feet away, his horse halted and half turned, lifting his revolver again. Mavering dove down the sand, lay still in the ditch, and heard the third bullet whine close by, an inch from his ear, then the swift flight of Morgan’s horse and the coming thunder of the squadron.

“Blanked if I don’t read his blanked letter! What in— ‘Pass man wearing loose black clothes, broad, stiff-brimmed hat, shaven lips, black beard, smooth hair, of sect called Dunkers, carrying saddle-bags, riding bay horse with white forefoot, through all Union lines—bears important information, give all facilities, forward to Washington, signed—’ And no signature.”

But the rattle and roar were at hand, and the sense of a thousand horsemen about to charge into the small of his back. He thought, “I’ll be searched in a minute,” swept a handful of sand over the paper, clambered up the bank and sat on the burned turf above, hugging his angular knees. The head horseman pulled to the right and shouted,

“The Debatable Land”

“Follow ’em half a mile, Cary, and wait there.”

The bulk of the squadron swept on.

“Search that man, you there! Pull that paper out of the sand.”

Mavering groaned disgustedly. Two men were up the bank, feeling him all over with skilled precision. The colonel pulled his chin-whisker over the mysterious writing. “What’s all this?” Mavering sat down again and brushed the sand from his trousers and long black coat-tails. His hat lay in the ditch. The troop remaining gathered in a semicircle, the colonel and Mavering in the centre, with ditch and the prostrate kicking horse between, practicable scenery of a September sky and burned woods around.

“I don’t know, colonel,” said Mavering, in solemn and rhythmic bass, “but I judge it’s a job put up on you by the recondite and taciturn captain of the troop lately departed. He appeared to drop it with a policy and plugged at me with a revolver when I picked it up.”

“You hid it, sir”—sharply.

“So I did. The truth is ever beautiful. He plugged my horse. Supposing he meant

“The Debatable Land”

that for you, I'm not backing his game to-day. It's too deep for me, anyhow.”

A young officer broke in at the colonel's elbow.

“Dunker? We passed that man Monday up by the river, colonel. He was scattering tracts.”

“Did? Here, then— Martinsburg, or further up! Go hard. Now, then, who are you?”

“Correspondent. You've got my credentials with the rest of the loot, of which you might lend me a dollar and a half and return the note-book containing a half-written but masterly article on—”

“Note-book? Article? Very good. Do for a Richmond paper. Credentials? Where— Oh!”

“Sign it J. R. Mavering, and tell 'em the price is forty dollars.”

The colonel was a small man, high-voiced, quick-eyed, but not without a certain cheerfulness. He glanced up from the papers with an appreciative twinkle. The men slouched easily in their saddles. The horses stamped and shifted.

“Here! Give these back to him.”

“Don't we take him, colonel?”

“The Debatable Land”

“No. What for? Give him back everything. All ready! Forward! Wait!” He pulled up suddenly.

“Mr. Mavering.” The little colonel was dignified.

Mavering pocketed his property calmly, as if in the common flux of things, the flowing change of time, scene, and event, it was not strange, whatever went and came, or however suddenly. Anyway, this world was a fleeting show, an incessant comedy without plot.

“Sir.”

“Such Northern newspapers as yours, which have—in the past, at least—been inclined to criticise the unprovoked invasion of Virginia, it is desired by the authorities that such newspapers should be treated with consideration. You follow me, sir?”

“With strict attention.” Mavering leaned forward, his hands on the burned turf. His feet dangled against the bank.

“Distinguished consideration. You will mention that attitude, no doubt.”

“No doubt at all.”

“Good-morning, sir.”

“Good-morning, colonel.”

“The Debatable Land”

The troop departed with crowded thud of hoofs and scatter of sand.

Mavering watched them out of sight, then slid down the bank and picked up his hat. He lifted the head of the prostrate horse, but the eyes were dull, the throat full of blood; unbuckled the bridle and slung it over his arm. The long, yellow level of the road-bed to the nearest curves was empty in both directions. He was quite alone in the desolation. He muttered and hummed in profoundest bass. “Singular game—‘Plaidie to the angry airt’—recondite, astrological. Make a note of it; cavalry officers as a class are eccentric and deep. It’s not my funeral. It appears to be the anchorite’s. ‘The brightest jewel in my crown’”— He crossed the road-bed, picked his way eastward into the woods, long-stepping, bridle on arm, gaunt and black, over the black ground among the gaunt, black stumps of the charred trees—“Wad be my queen.”

Chapter XV

Treats of the Distribution of Tracts in the Valley of the Shenandoah.

THE Shenandoah goes by the eastern edge of the wide valley, murmuring its own musical name, "Shenandoah," as if it knew the word's significance in glory, tumult, and pain, but had taught all three to march to a quiet requiem; "Shenandoah"—old, unhappy, far-off things, under the lulling and palliation now of many years.

Gard rode directly south, through plodding, dusty lines of haggard-eyed men, and came to it a few miles above the junction and the famous Ferry. The cannon boomed all day on his left over by the larger river. He rode by daylight and openly and none seemed to doubt him; his dress and little printed tracts were passports enough for the time. He fell into the habit, first by impulse and then by policy, of carrying a tract in his hand, using its subject and phraseology for the next

“The Debatable Land”

conversation and entering on the subject promptly.

It gave him a sense of detachment and isolation of a peculiar kind, this urging on some weary and hurrying group a doctrine of peace, compassion, and humility, as if the manner and language were working inward and growing less alien to him, and he really were a mysterious evangelist—a messenger with spiritual tidings and council. He noticed—and it seemed from its recurrence to have a certain pathos—that, after the laughter which rose around him in most cases had subsided, the faces would lose their weariness and strain, and seem to express another side of their humanity. They reminded him, then, of the fruit-seller and the policeman on the avenue, where he used to go to and from the Brotherhood of Consolation and the Church of the Trinity, who recognized in him some one apart and remote from the current of events—the river of humanity on the avenue.

It was even a more turbulent river that was pouring west and southwest along the two railroads leading from the Ferry. They were beginning to tear up and burn the northern line, but along the other the trains still moved

“The Debatable Land”

in puffing succession. To Gard the sense of the part he played was strong almost to reality. The quaint, biblical, old-world phrases which he ever kept reading and repeating reacted upon him. He seemed, even to himself, to become intangible and apart.

“What shall a man take in exchange for his soul?” halting his horse and taking out the little white tract.

“I don’t know. If you’ve got a plug of tobacco I might trade.”

“If I had any, friend, I would give it to you freely.”

The man looked at him curiously.

“I reckon you would now. This the best you know how, ain’t it?”

Others who had stopped laughed and swarmed around. “Give me one!” “Me one!”

“There are more who need them.”

“Oh, all right.”

“No hogs here.”

“Good-luck to you, elder.”

The stream flowed on, some chuckling over their tracts, some silent. An officer said:

“You ought to get a pass, elder.” So he came to where the Shenandoah murmured its musical name. A range of blue mountains

“The Debatable Land”

rose beyond it. There seemed to be little going on by the river. The retreat had shifted to the west along the railroads into the Opequan valley, and he turned and rode west among low, wooded hills. It was Wednesday. They were tearing and burning the southern of the two railroads now—an endless row of bonfires of the ties, the iron rails laid across them to be heated for bending.

“‘Let not your hearts be troubled.’”

A man bending over a rail drew his hand back, swore lustily, and straightened up.

“What’s that? Oh!” He took the tract.

“That’s what it says, sure enough. Maybe you don’t know that rail was hot.” The tract was passed around. One read aloud, “He hath taken charge and command. He hath established His law.”

Gard sat motionless on his horse, looking placidly over their heads to the pale-blue horizon.

“Who is the one greatest in authority here?”

“This side of God Almighty and Winchester, I reckon you mean the old man. Hi, lieutenant!” The cantering officer pulled up. “He wants the general.”

“Does, does he? What for?”

“The Debatable Land”

A pause. Gard dropped his eyes to the officer who was reading the tract.

“It is said to be best that I should have his permission to—”

“Oh, I see. Come along, then.”

They rode beside the track through strata of heat and smoke from the fires, Gard following. It occurred to him that he had given his name on an impulse the day before as Moselle, and would possibly need it now. They came to a group of horsemen, talking, except one in front of them, who watched the toiling squads silently. He wore a full black beard, and sat his horse awkwardly.

“This seems to be some kind of a missionary, general. He wants to see you.”

The general glanced up under the brim of his slouched hat; then suddenly flung back his head, so that his big beard stood out from his chest, and said, simply:

“What do you want?”

“I am directed by a Session of the Brethren to distribute these.”

“Who are you?”

“Of a congregation in Maryland.”

“What is your name?”

“Moselle.”

“The Debatable Land”

“Who are the Brethren?”

“We are called Dunkers by those not of our communion. We do not use the name.”

“There was a church of that sect near Sharpsburg.”

“It is our church.”

“They seemed to be German. You have no accent.”

“It was said to be the reason I was chosen—the speaking freely the language. It was said at the Session.”

“Very well.”

He dropped his eyes to the tract in his hand. Gard remained placid, persistent.

“It was said a permission might be written.”

“Very well.”

He wrote a few words on a scrap of paper and handed it to Gard.

“May I keep this tract in exchange?”

“It is not exchanged. It is given.”

Gard turned his horse. The general looked up.

“You are a young man”—silence—“But your sect takes no part in wars.” Gard waited. “Do you know the subject of this tract?”

“It is on the text, ‘I must be about my Father’s business.’”

“The Debatable Land”

The general seemed to have in mind to say more. He looked at Gard peculiarly—not quite as the others had seemed to do, half suspecting, half recognizing an alien being, a moral and mental unknown at some withdrawn height, but as if recognizing one like himself in isolation and pilgrimage, and so understanding his bearing and capacity for silence.

The horsemen behind whispered and smiled.

“Very well.” The general turned again to the working squads, and Gard rode away in the smoke that drifted from the fires across the track. He had a sense, too, of some flash of recognition that had gone below the part he was playing, and seemed to involve a salutation and question of other import and circumstance, a recognition of kinship in the knowledge of other realities than the feet walk upon or the eyes see; knowledge of the silence out of which one is born, of the flux of his present, of destiny in ambush, of the “stream of the flying constellations,” and the steady pour of time, “inhaled as a vapor”; knowledge of the individual’s own lonely issue in the midst of these. But the turning again to his working squads seemed to have been the general’s solution—or, at least, conclusion. “Very well”;

“The Debatable Land”

one must be about the business set him to do. “He must work in his garden,” had been more than one sage’s conclusion.

Gard did not entirely wish to work his way back to the point of view that once had been his, of a spectator of events, who only acted in them in order to appreciate them vividly. He wished to regain his old enthusiasm, the poise and the clear sense of things, the interest, dulled since the Peninsular campaign; and for the rest, to go on to positions requiring new definitions. So far as the general had served as a councillor, he had seemed to advise attention to business, to imply that there was personal value in simple and direct doing.

During the two following days Gard rode along the railroad to Winchester, and up and down the Opequan valley, picking up information and asking such questions as he could make bear on the distribution of tracts. Once or twice he thought he recognized a face he had seen across the road by the Dunker church. It was not impossible. But one could not identify from such smoky glimpses.

On Saturday he left Winchester and went eastward, crossing the Opequan where the turnpike led by a shallow, rippling ford, and the

“The Debatable Land”

flat-fenced meadows of the bottom lands were all about. His saddle-bags were nearly empty, and beyond the Blue Ridge he might find means to send a message north.

A horseman was watering his horse at the ford, his hat tipped back, a bandage around his head. They greeted, and Gard handed him a tract.

“Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown.” It was one of the faces he seemed to have seen.

“Oh, you’re that missionary they call ‘Abstract Piety.’ Well, look here!”

He stopped and stared. Gard leaned forward to let his horse drink, saw his own face in the stream, and wondered what it might mean to the man with the bandage who watched him, and whom he had somewhere seen. It might be a critical question, what his face meant to the man with the bandage. Crises! As one went on, every step was a crisis between the moment past and the moment in front. The current streaked the reflections in the water, and there were little brown minnows holding their heads up-stream. He noticed his own expression in the reflection—the impassive mask that he had come to wear without effort, the spade-shaped beard, the lips whiter

“The Debatable Land”

than the rest of the tanned skin, which might suggest to the acute that the shaving of them was recent, the swift curve of the hair-line, the heavy eyelids over eyes that looked up dreamily out of the wavering water. He thought that, from an artistic standpoint, he must look his part, or something like it, with an emphasis. But every one travels by his own road to his own conclusions. The man, whose white bandage wavered and gleamed in the water near his own reflection, reminded him of one from whom he had taken a pistol in the cornfield by the Dunker church, whose eyes had been mad and glaring, and his hair soaked in his own blood. In fact, that was the face. Crises! Did it mean the sudden end of his running days? Probably either his or the other man's. Their reflections in the stream seemed to parody them, to watch and mimic. The water chuckled. There was something ironic in things. One fancied the current of time itself to be streaming and streaked yellow in the sunlight, and full of bubbles. The minnows poised and darted against the stream.

Gard's horse flung up his head with a start.

“If the message I have given you is not for you, will you not give it to another?”

“The Debatable Land”

As he left the water he heard the other's horse splashing behind him. The road turned from the river through a sandy cut in the woods. At the woods' edge the bandaged head was beside him.

“Stranger, you don't happen to have that gun about you you stole from me?”

Gard turned and looked into the small, black, fatal circle of a pistol barrel, like an eye-socket with the ball in ominous retreat.

“I do not carry weapons,” he said, quietly.

“You don't! I reckon you do. You ought to have plugged me down at the ford with one of those weapons you don't carry. We're going back.”

“If you wish to take my life—”

“I'd like to, mightily.”

“Very well.”

“You're a Yankee spy. Wheel around there and keep ahead.”

“This mistake delays me. I have permission—”

“Keep your hand out of your pocket.”

Gard paused an instant, then said: “Very well,” and turned his horse slowly to the right, shook his left foot from the stirrup, and guided his horse close in. Their right

“The Debatable Land”

shoulders almost touched. He gripped the man's pistol-hand and throat with the same movement. The pistol spat past his cheek. He heaved, left foot in the saddle, and leaped. The man gurgled, and they fell over his horse's cruppers heavily in the road, the man below on his bandaged head. The bandage fell off; his blood trickled into the dust, and he lay still. The horses had cantered apart.

Gard twisted his head around as he lay athwart, looked an instant, and loosened his hand from the black-bearded throat. The grip was so hard and sinewy, it was like untying a knot. It took effort, as if his muscles had been screwed up and rusted in place. The man was dead or stunned.

Gard got up with the pistol in his hand. He brushed his own clothes, caught his horse, sent the other's with a cut from a switch galloping away into the woods, and came back. He found cartridges and a glass flask full of whiskey in the man's pockets, and put them in his own. If not dead, perhaps he had better be; otherwise one must change disguise, and proper disguises were not easy. He slipped a cartridge and cocked the trigger.

The sun above the trees shone on the livid

“The Debatable Land”

face in the dust. It was about noon, and the hour that Maverick stalked from the sandy road-bed thirty miles away into the charred forest and murmured: “It’s not my funeral. It appears to be the anchorite’s.”

On the whole, the neighborhood was too lively for loose pistol-shooting. Gard lifted the limp body and carried it into a thicket, brought the bandage and laid it beside, kicked the dust over the blood-pools in the road, mounted his horse and smoothed his face, trying to settle its placidity.

He trotted and cantered all the afternoon northeastward among low hills, passing many untroubled farm-yards, but little soldiery. A couple of horsemen said, “Howdy, elder,” and seemed to have met with him and his mission before. He gave them one of his few remaining tracts absent-mindedly, without answering, came when the sun was low to the Shenandoah, and heard it murmur its musical name.

“Probably he’d been more convenient dead.”

The bridge was burned. He swam his horse through the current. The blue mountains fronted him darkly against the sky. The turnpike led up through a gap and so

“The Debatable Land”

over into the elder Virginia. It was dark when he reached the end of the meadow lands where the upward pitch and the woods of the mountain road began. “Probably he’d be handier that way.”

At the top of the gap were open pastures, a cabin where a dog barked, but no light shone in the windows. The stars were out innumera-ly, the valley behind in the cold, blue vapor of the night.

“But it might be better to change the part, after all,” he thought; “better for luck.”

Fortune might grow weary, a good mule be overworked, a good tune sung too long; for instance, the doxology was a good tune, two-four time, the measure of the tread of the moral law, a taciturn, single-minded tune, something like the general who sat his horse awkwardly by the burning railroad.

The moon that was slender and new at Antietam had grown round as a shield and rose late. Beyond the pastures on the gap the road led down through the woods to the elder land asleep in the moonrise.

“*Einst, O Wunder, einst,*” the world and the young man, the big wars, the stir of living! And how wonderful then the moon and the

“The Debatable Land”

night's infinite valleys, the glory of being and of loneliness, when to be a living soul was royal and the splendor of the night was its crown, when palpable currents, rivers thrilling and divine, poured into it, as the universe paid homage to its worth. Gard felt that he had somewhere lost his resonance. He must look for another coat and a happier disposition, shave his beard and shake dice with chance again. The road plunged down into the cavern of the woods. He let his horse pick his way, and judged the character of the road-bed from the sound of his steps below in the darkness.

Chapter XVI

Which Discloses one Daddy Joe, and Disposes of an
Evangelist

IT was chilly at that height. Gard rode all night down the mountain-side, and saw at last the lights of moon and sunrise mingling over the meadows and cornfields of a plantation close below him. The forest grew thinner and broke into clearing and pastures. He left the highway by an old cart-road whose ruts were grass-grown, though its centre was trodden hard by many human feet, and passed an empty building of rough boards—a school-house or a negro church. The big chestnuts hung over it, and underbrush grew up to its windows. The path went to the door, swerved aside through the thicket, and at last ran into a little, lonely, hollow pasture, with the sunlight pouring over its edge as into a cup. He picketed his horse to a thin sapling that would bend and let the horse eat, and lay down near a boulder where the sunlight seemed to be the

“The Debatable Land”

yellowest, smiling to feel the warmth steal through him. “There’s too much luxury in my bones for an evangelist.” Presently he was asleep. The sun mounted, swung around by the south, and the shadow of the boulder went over the sleeper. An old negro, with bowed head and cane in hand, stumped vigorously along the path towards the building under the chestnuts. He passed the boulder on the other side, and saw neither the sleeper nor the horse picketed among the saplings and feeding quietly. He wore a suit of fine broadcloth, the coat lined with silk and stained and threadbare, a white vest, a blue, dotted cravat, and a soft, gray hat. After that the clearing was silent except for passing crows and drowsy insects.

Suddenly the woods became choral, a burst of singing from the chestnut grove. Gard started, sat up, and listened.

“That’s no jingle! That’s music!”

He jumped to his feet and ran across the pasture, crept hurriedly through a thicket to a window brushed by leaves of the underwood. He was absorbed and eager.

“Man there with a voice like a bass viol!” he muttered.

“The Debatable Land”

“ I wished I didn’t wake an’ sleep,
I wished I did lay down an’ weep,
By Jordan, Jordan.
If I could come to that Dead Sea,
I’d wade up stream to Galilee,
By Jordan.”

Each verse boomed up a noble crescendo and fell away in plaintive minor chords. The preacher in the pulpit, in white vest, dotted cravat, and fashionably cut coat, cried:

“Mou’n an’ pray! Mou’n an’ pray!”

“ I wished I weep when Jesus weep,
I wished he wash me wid he sheep
In Jordan, Jordan.
I’d drown in Jordan wave and shout—
‘Lord Jesus take my white soul out
Of Jordan.’ ”

“You wa’mín, brer’n, you wa’mín! Lo’d God! Jordan! Mou’n an’ pray!”

“ I wished the burden on my soul
Would roll away. Roll, Jordan, roll!
Roll, Jordan, Jordan!
Lord Jesus disher sheep astray,
Ain’ You gwine show me yonder way
To Jordan?”

“De tex’,” began the preacher, “is ’bout er man what he Lord len’ him a talent—da’s a big bit of money, oom!—an’ he wrap it in a napkin caze he skeered of it an’ hide it, an’

“The Debatable Land”

go 'way crackin' he knuckle-bones. 'Hiyi!' An' he Lord say, 'You shif'less brack rascal! Ain' you got sense to buy er cow what he feed in de pasture, an' bimeby deh's er calf, an' de cow's good as befo', an' da's de calf, wuf eighteen dollars, Confed'ate money?' Das' what Mars Ca'leton give Miss Meely fo' de white yeahlin' what ain' any special so't of er calf. He Lord say, 'Give me dat talent! You go hoe co'n in de co'nfield. I spec you skeered to tu'n roun' when you get de end of de row. You ain' got business ent'prise,' he say. 'You go fin' er slipper-sloppy mud turkle what know how keep he shirt on he back an' he fingeys an' toes inside he shirt, an' lay down in de slipper-sloppy mud wid him. Da's de habit an' per-fession,' he say, 'ez sholy 'bout right fo' you.' Disher's de sayin' of scripcheh, caze Miss Meely read it ter me las' night, an' ef it ain' de exac' wo'ds, da's de efficaciousness. Da's de efficaciousness. Wha's de residuum?

“Ef you kotch a rabbit, an' skin him, an' clean him to he bone meat, an' bile him till he swim in he own gravy, an' smell, oom! he smell sweeter 'n Miss Meely's flower-gyarden, da's de efficaciousness of de rabbit. But afteh you done et de rabbit, an' he mek de sunshine in-

“The Debatable Land”

side, an' de notion how soon you go kotch one mo', da's de residuum. I tell you fo' sho fac'. Wha's de residuum? Ain' I heah las' week to Leesburg how de Yankees done mek er Proclamation, an' deh pos' it on de do' of de Cyounty House up no'th, dat de niggehs gwine all be free? Ain' Brer Jacob dar skip up f'om de gyarden whar he rakin' weeds an' tell Miss Meely how he gwine be free? Ain' Miss Meely cuff he yeahs fo' pesterin' her? Ain' he got no mo' use fo' he freedom 'n ter gallop roun' fo' he got it, an' pester Miss Meely what been shovin' co'n pone 'n bacon in he mouf since he been a pickaninny? Oom!

“What you gwine do wid er talent ef you got it? Gwine git so tickle befo' you know what it is? Gwine git ter de end of de co'n row an' hoe on out 'n in de swamp caze ain' no man tell you tu'n. Gwine lie in de roadway for er jumpy-tail wabble-yeah rabbit run down you mouf when you hungry? Gwine splash in de creek wid de mud turkle wid he fingeys an' toes wrap in he shirt. Hiyah! Oom! Comin' a day of-er-er-lamentation an' dry bones, when de whippo' will be cryin' he lonesome lak he lookin' fo' some one he cyarn fin'; an' ef he lookin' fo' a nig-

“The Debatable Land”

geh wuf len'in' a talent to, da's some one he cyarn fin'.

“He Lord len' him a talent, say de good book. Oom! De efficaciousness of de tex' am disher solemn wa'nin'. Don' go roun' ast white folks len' you money. De borrowin' money's de beginnin' of trouble. Ain' nobody know when deh gwine ast fo' it again. Mote ast fo' it de day afteh you put in er pocket wid de hole clean down de groun'. Mote tell you buy er cow an' wait fo' de calf, what de sojers take it lak deh tuk Miss Meely's ho'ses 'cep de two up in de hill pasture. De efficaciousness of de tex' am disher solemn wa'nin. Wha's de residuum?”

The preacher swung his arms over his head shouting:

“Jo'dan! Jo'dan! Ain' no shinin', ain' no gladness, on'y 'yond Jo'dan! Ain' gwine be no free niggeh! Ain' gwine be no slave! Gwine 'yond Jo'dan!”

The congregation swayed, moaned, shouted:

“Jordan! Jordan!”

“Ain' I hyah de whippo'will cryin' de yeven-in', 'Daddy Joe, come 'yond Jo'dan, Daddy Joe.' Jo'dan Jo'dan!”

“Amen!”

“The Debatable Land”

“Now you shoutin’!”

From his ambush Gard could see the preacher plainly through the window and two or three of the swaying heads nearest the preacher. The service from now on seemed like an incoherent tumult, the preacher’s voice now and then above it, crying, “Mou’n an’ pray!” until, at last, after half an hour, it all died away, and there was silence except for the sobbing, moaning, and panting. The preacher had sat down, or was not in sight from where Gard was hidden. Some one unseen at the other end of the building began to sing softly:

“There’s a little wheel am turning in my heart.”

Gradually the congregation dropped into the melody, all singing softly.

“There’s a little wheel am turning in my heart,
In my heart, in my heart.
That little wheel am Jesus in my heart,
In my heart, in my heart—
I don’ want no deception in my heart.”

There was a long prayer in a husky whisper. The preacher seemed exhausted. The meeting broke up. Gard counted fifty or more as they

“The Debatable Land”

came out. They all took the path to the highway, except the preacher, who stumped away towards the pasture. Gard waited till everything was still, then stepped into the path and followed him. When he came into the pasture he saw the old man down by the bunch of saplings, examining the horse, and joined him promptly.

“Good-morning, friend.”

“Mo’nin, sah; disher you ho’sse, sah?”

Gard felt in the saddle-bags and found a couple of tracts left.

“You do not know how to read? These are two short sermons upon the texts, ‘Who-soever calleth his brother a fool is in danger of hell-fire,’ and ‘He that loseth himself shall find himself.’ You live over there, in a cabin by yourself?”

“Hey! Yes, sah.”

“If you like I will go with you and read you these sermons?”

They went up the pasture, and left the horse feeding under the saplings.

The old man seemed awe-struck, as if he thought Gard might be some such spiritual stranger as visited the prophets of old and the chosen servants of the Lord. He walked on,

“The Debatable Land”

looking up shyly at his sudden guest, who went beside him, straight, slim, and sinewy, with sun-tanned skin, shaven lips, silky black beard, singular hat, with broad, stiff brim, and did not, surely, in that garb at least, look like other men. When they came to where the path passed from the clearing into the thicket again the negro stepped aside. Gard motioned and said:

“After you, Daddy Joe.”

“Ain’ he know my name! Ain’ he know my name!”

The path led down and came out on the bank of a creek, with old willows along it and a single little cabin back of the willows in a meadow. Across the creek were cornfields, and in the distance the chimneys of a large plantation house.

Gard asked, “Have you something for me to eat?”

“Yes, sah. Yes, sah.”

They sat down on a rickety bench at the cabin door, and Gard read the two tracts while Daddy Joe watched with troubled, pathetic eyes, and after it brought out corn-bread and bacon sizzling in a pan. The sunshine was warm. Some bird whistled shrilly in the willows over the brown, sluggish creek. The

“The Debatable Land”

smoke of the distant chimneys hung heavily. Gard felt as if he would like to let his business slide and watch for hours dreamily the hanging smoke, and gather the sense of contrast between the tumult of the times and spirit of the settled land brooded over by memories of generations at peace, of homes and familiar things.

“Daddy Joe,” he said, suddenly, “we must work in our garden.”

Daddy Joe seemed to think that normal remarks were not to be expected from a visitant, possibly heavenly, at any rate having intimate knowledge and a message to deliver.

“Yes, sah. Da’s a fac’. We must work in de gyarden, sholy.”

“I have something for you to do.” He stopped. Daddy Joe’s sermon had seemed to imply an adverse opinion to negro freedom.

“You are wrong, Daddy Joe. It would be better for the slaves to be free.”

“Fo’ God!”

“You really think so yourself. This is what you think, that it is meant they shall be free, but it is right to tell them that their freedom will be a trial for them and many of them will fail. This is what you think.”

“The Debatable Land”

“Da’s sholy de efficaciousness.”

“You will promise, then, in order to help this forward, to do what I tell you, and in secret, so that no one here shall know. It is a small thing, but a help to the cause of the Union armies, which is the cause of the nation and the negro—you will do this?”

“Yes, sah,” in a trembling and awed whisper.

“The promise is upon your conscience as a preacher of the Word.”

“Yes, sah,” almost inaudibly.

“This is it, then. You will give me the clothes you are wearing, for which I will pay you twenty dollars, and one of the horses hidden in the hill pasture.”

“Fo’ God!”

“You will take my horse in exchange, ride to-morrow morning, before daybreak, for Leesburg, and take the train to Washington. Have you ever been in Washington?”

“Yes, sah.”

“I will give you a paper which you will show to any soldier about Washington who stops you, and he will let you pass. In the city you will find the War Department, and there leave that paper and another I will give you. The second paper you will not let any one see before

“The Debatable Land”

you leave it at the War Department. You will there be given forty dollars. When you return you will come at night and take the horse up to the hill pasture. Will you have to account for your absence?”

“Miss Meely done lef’ me go preachin’ round de cyounty, sah. Miss Meely”—hesitating—
“Miss Meely te’ible sot down on de Yankees, sah.”

“Be careful, then. We must work in our garden.”

“Sholy.”

“And you see that this is your duty.”

“Yes, sah.”

“To-morrow morning, before daybreak, in the road beyond your church, we will separate, and you will not see me any more.”

Beside Daddy Joe’s bowed-down humility and belief Gard had a sensation that in a measure was new—a sense of ignobleness and triviality. In some strange way there seemed to rise out of Daddy Joe a certain spiritual stature and significance. One seemed to discern that nowhere in his soul did he play a part, or play at anything, or remember himself. He took Gard to be perhaps, a half-divine evangelist. In Daddy Joe’s primitive faith, Gard

“The Debatable Land”

fancied, heavenly incarnated messengers came as easily among men as his ancestral gods had come in the jungle; spirits, evil or good, still rode the night wind; a magical influence of benefit or harm was a quality of things, like their color and touch.

It was out of these conditions that the historic faiths had come, with their deep simplicities. The torch-bearers, with fresh fire, men who travailed with the secrets of the future, had so sat in doorways, taught such as Daddy Joe the master words, and forgot the times filled with wars and policies, while the sunlight was on the grainfields, some brown creek quiet in its bed, and the hearth smoke hanging in the air. But he had not any such message for Daddy Joe, and felt trivial in his mask. Wars and policies, too, were trivial, shadows drifting across the cornfields, ripples on the slow mass of the creek. It was what occurred to men in doorways and by roadsides that was of importance, that lit the torches and determined the massed current.

In the dark of the dawn they separated at the highway. Daddy Joe rode downward on Gard's horse with the white forefoot. A few hundred feet and he pulled up, turned in his saddle, and

“The Debatable Land”

looked back. The horse and man going up under the pine avenue seemed to loom large and vague in the gloom.

“Fo’ God,” he whispered, “ain’ gwine see him no mo’.”

In the broad daylight on top of the gap Gard examined his clothes, rubbed the smoothness of his shaven face, and observed that the horse he rode was an iron-gray. The clothes were a gray felt hat, a long, black coat, threadbare and lined with silk, a white vest, dotted necktie and unstarched linen, black trousers, and his own shoes. He thought he might resemble a seedy Southern gentleman in possession of a whiskey flask and an eccentric plan for the capture of the city of Washington. He might imagine a resemblance in spirit to Jack Maver-ing. It would furnish a basis and a sequence.

He came to the burned bridge on the Shenandoah. Three or four horsemen were on the other side who met and greeted him when he had crossed.

“Howdy.”

“Howdy.”

Gard wrung the water from his wet clothes and waited. One of the horsemen drew a paper from his pocket.

“The Debatable Land”

“Haven’t seen a man like this anywhere, have you?” and read from the paper.

“ ‘Loose, black clothes, broad, stiff-brimmed hat, shaven lips, black beard, smooth hair, of sect called Dunkers, carrying saddle-bags, riding bay horse with white forefoot.’ ”

Gard considered.

“I wouldn’t gamble on the fo’ foot,” he said, slowly, “but there was an individual resembling otherwise that lucid and cyarefully boiled description over ’yond the ridge. He gave me a printed little damn sheet which contained discourteous ref’ences to hell-fire. But”—thoughtfully—“that ho’s’e, ’pears to me his feet matched.”

“Never mind. That’s the man. They said he went over the ridge. Where’d he go from then?”

“He ’peared to be pointed for Harper’s Ferry.”

“Well, we’ve lost him, then.”

Gard looked sympathetic and reached down into the tails of his coat.

“There’s only one thing, seh, that’s equally good for disappointment and wet feet. This heah whiskey never paid any duty to the United States—I have my doubts, seh, whether it paid

“The Debatable Land”

any to the Confed'acy. I should like to devote a generous percentage to the use of the Confed'acy. You wouldn't mind assuming charge of that percentage?"

A moment later the other asked, "Have you got the tract that Yankee scout gave you?"

"Who?"

"The Dunker."

"Oh! ve'y good! As applied to me, I took the ref'ences to be discourteous. I gave it, seh, to a niggeh."

Chapter XVII

On the Question of the Exact Location of the Divinity
which is Ultimately Called Worth While

THERE is said to be a divinity in our discontent, the pull of some large law and onward gravitation such as tends to make vivid rivers, and only where it fails to influence are stagnant pools. On stagnant pools the water-lilies float, no doubt, white and passionate in fragrance, and cardinal flowers are along their shores; but law and divinity seem to be with the rivers—such rivers as the Shenandoah, which Gard met at different points, and often enough during October, until it had become a familiar sight—until the leaves of the oaks had turned a burnished red-and-bronze, and the Confederate army had moved far up the valley. He passed through the army, around it, and back again, explained his scheme for the capture of Washington, collected orders for the delivery of unlicensed whiskey, and walked in the shadow of his discontent.

“The Debatable Land”

In answer to the question, “What am I in my being, my centre and self?” that centre and self seemed to grow featureless to his questioning. The continual acting of a part suggested the question—his being able to assume a character, to fill it out, to mould himself to it, and so to act it consistently and hardly with conscious effort, emphasized the question. Had he no shape of his own to protest against the presumption of other shapes? Was a man no more in reality than a piece of lead pipe for ideas, impressions, and emotions of unknown origin to run through for the mere purpose of passage, and finally to wear thin and wear out? Not altogether, since each experience seemed to leave him not what he was before. The meeting with Daddy Joe and with the general by the burning railroad had left persistent memories. These two at least seemed to him to have centre, character, and anchorage. They stood out in distinction. They had shape and color and definition, and a certain inner stature. Together with this distinctness and stature there had been noticeable in both a singular absorption in something not themselves. The general had seemed to think there was more point in his work than in himself,

“The Debatable Land”

at least to turn to his work as if he thought it best to act on that belief—Daddy Joe to have given up his soul to wonder and awe of his visitor. The text of one of the tracts he had given to Daddy Joe had been, “He that loseth himself shall find himself,” and he remembered noticing Daddy Joe’s wonder and troubled look, and thinking him badly lost. It was a cryptic kind of saying—“He that loseth himself shall find himself.”

This business by the Shenandoah, this close fingering of peril and card-play between life and death, both parties being sharpers, ought properly to be absorbing and exciting. To attain distinctness, how could one be better elsewhere than in the valley of the Shenandoah, in an isolation so complete from all whom he met from day to day, hostile in purpose to them all, a single eddy against a wide current? Yet, when he looked within himself he seemed to see a space merely where forms flitted through and singing gusts of wind passed, but none found a home. The general at his work for a cause that was a doomed anachronism was something. Daddy Joe, in adoration of his hollow demi-god and shamming evangelist, was something. “Who or what am I? Is there any

“The Debatable Land”

truth or any lie that from the bottom of me I believe, any goal I hope for, any man or woman I cling to?” One pictured the individual to be a kind of self-fed fire. One denied conventions of the mind and claimed his issue to be his own, his solitary pilgrimage from one eternity to another; he would look about him as he went and take note, neither lose himself nor cloud his eye nor cumber his feet, for the time would be short, and there would be much to see. Now, what he was doing and had done was nothing, for he did not care about it; and what he had felt and thought was little, only those flitting forms and gusts of wind that made a stir in their passage and left echoes behind them—some sandy sediment, perhaps—some changes in the mould or shell.

If men, failing to find the infinite and the spirit outside of themselves—anywhere above or beneath or around—concluded it must be within, there lay the logic of their introspection. How, then, if in the centre of that “within” were found only an echoing space? At the touch of this discovery would not all structured dreams fall suddenly to dust and ashes, all illumined purposes lose their flush? “Be yourself,” cried the latest seers, rising from the

“The Debatable Land”

discouragement of faiths faded into myths, an ancient sun frightened from the eastern skies by their questioning. “Maintain your poise, look within, for there hides divinity in that holy of holies of a man of which his body is the temple. A pilgrim you are, from the darkness behind to the mystery before, and the universe is a road for your travelling soul.” “Be myself! Who or what am I? The holy of holies appears empty, and no altar is there, either, nor self-fed fire.” Was the universe so mad a joke as to be a road merely for the travelling of such bubbles, blown spherically with tainted air, colored with solar fantasies, apt to dissolve suddenly to a drop of soapy moisture in the dust by some such accident as was probable enough in the valley of the Shenandoah?

The epochs in life, then, were not its physical events, but crises in thought, some sudden or gradual conviction or disillusioning. Gard felt now that this had come upon him gradually, beginning from the Peninsular campaign.

No doubt, whatever one thought was the dwelling-place of divinity, or whatever he called the one thing worth while, if it presently appeared not to be there, there was always a

“The Debatable Land”

marvellous emptiness in its place, a world apparently convicted of barrenness, since its growths were convicted of illusion—a point in experience once called “the Everlasting No,” a period of fretful discontent. It did not seem probable that the lost law and divinity were at sanctuary in that discontent.

Meanwhile in the valley of the Shenandoah the oak foliage kindled and smouldered in dull red, as if its approaching death were a matter of pride and stately celebration, and Gard led a singular dual existence, one side of which seemed to be a staring at a topless and bottomless distaste, and the other to be an argument that good whiskey was cheaply and secretly distilled in certain portions of western Virginia, to the discomfiture of the United States—that, if the Confederate army would purchase and absorb enough of it, the capture of Washington would become immediately probable.

The behavior, the schemes, inventions and discourses of this secondary personage of his creating had an objective interest. It seemed to Gard to be in its way a noteworthy character, judged as a piece of creative fiction.

It was modelled on Mavington, but gathered details from day to day and perfected its sym-

“The Debatable Land”

metry. It appeared to have volition, a speech and individual oddities all its own, which he was hardly aware of having invented.

Some days after his return he came by the Opequan and the place where he had fallen headlong in the road with the man of the bandage. He turned his horse into the bushes. The body lay still in its place. The “secondary personage” commented aloud in character, and to Gard’s surprise.

“It appears you didn’ furnish that cyarfully boiled description.”

He broke boughs and threw them over the body, mounted again and rode on.

“That’s the injustice of circumstance.”

A few hundred yards beyond he met a detail of soldiers, halted them, and said to the officer:

“Do you see that white birch?”

“Yes.”

“Very good. Theah’s a co’pse of a day or two no’t of it which I discove’d accident’ly and threw over it a tributo’y leaf. It looked to me,” with an air of reminiscence and respect, “like a gentleman that might have known good whiskey in his time.”

“I’ll look at him. Reckon I know who you are. Haven’t captured Washington yet?”

“The Debatable Land”

The men around grinned.

“The difficulty, seh, with the management of this campaign, is its impe’viousness to ideas. Good-mo’ning, seh.”

It was the first week in November when he rode across the Long Bridge into Washington and fastened his horse to a tree in front of the War Department.

He sent in his name, and the summons came promptly. He entered an inner office, and was alone with a thick-set man with a grim mouth, and beard falling half-way down his chest, who rapidly turned the leaves of a book of entry.

“Captain Windham?” he said, and went on turning the leaves.

“Yes, sir.”

“I have received three despatches from you. September 30th, by an old negro. Christian name, Joe.”

“Daddy Joe,” murmured Gard.

“Not at all! Simply Joe.”

“Oh! I thought it was Daddy,” said Gard, sadly.

“Joe—simply Joe. October 15th, by an officer of General ——’s brigade, on sick leave; name, Burton. October 24th, by Army Post. Harper’s Ferry. Is that correct?”

“The Debatable Land”

“Yes, sir. I’m the fourth. I’m dated November 7th.”

“I am aware of the date,” said the other, sharply.

He seemed to suspect some frivolous irony in his visitor, a lack of seriousness and respect, a motion of humor repellent to the authoritative and downright atmosphere of that office. Then he glanced suddenly at the calendar and frowned.

“You are mistaken, sir. It is the 6th.”

Gard dropped his eyes to his torn and weather-stained old gray hat, and turned it slowly around his finger.

“It comes from being so long down there,” he said, regretfully. “I thought their calendar was one day ahead of ours. They seemed to get there about one day ahead.”

The other glared at him through his spectacles, then said, shortly:

“I will take your information.”

After the questioning and writing were finished he continued:

“I will forward this to the new commander-in-chief, appointed yesterday, the 5th”—with another glance at the calendar for security—“in place of the late commander-in-chief, re-

“The Debatable Land”

lieved,” and looked up quickly as if expecting to find some revenge or satisfaction in his surprise. But Gard did not seem to be surprised or interested. He looked at a vigorous clump of hair at the top of the official’s head, then down at his old hat indifferently.

“I think that I should like a furlough.”

The other was irritated, almost fierce.

“Send in your application and I will see that it is granted. That’s all. Good-day. Captain Windham, it remains for me to say that you have done very well—remarkably well—and appear to be exhausted in proportion. I repeat, you have done very well.”

“I think”—Gard paused at the door—“I think it was Daddy Joe.”

“Good-day, sir!”

Gard went down the steps, and wondered at his caring so little whether he had done well or not. He did not know why he had wanted to irritate that irritable but powerful official. It had seemed at the time to have points of interest. Probably if one cared about a military career it would not be wise to irritate officials, and, if one did not, it lacked interest.

“He thinks himself something, that one. But”—untying his horse—“I suppose he is.”

“The Debatable Land”

And he rode down the great avenue, whistling,
“The Campbells are coming—tra-la!”

Hundreds of flags hung from windows and waved over buildings. The white dome of the capitol rose up in the distance against the sky. A regimental band was playing a quickstep somewhere near. Towards the river the trunk of the half-built monument stood, purposing in time to commemorate one thought to have been something in his time.

“This sort of thing is no great success. There must be something wrong with me. I think I’ll go to Italy. Rhymes! What, ho! I will be a poet. Let the Campbells come, let the Campbells go. It’s a foolish tune.” Why so enthusiastic at bowling over one’s inoffensive brethren in mortality? That sounded like Jack Mavering, another homeless adventurer and piece of fragmentary pottery, who did not care, either, about the commander of the Army of the Potomac, and might be taking lunch now in that restaurant with the gilt sign, the resort of correspondents and small officers. Italy! The *Citronen blühen* there, and one was either a monk or an artist, or in love with an almond-eyed shepherdess—was something with a denomination, at least, and

“The Debatable Land”

an ideal for a perquisite. He would go and tell Helen and Mrs. Mavering. Helen would dislike his not caring, and say so, in fact, with vigor. He might omit it and enlarge on Italy.

“I wonder what she’ll say? I shouldn’t like it if she looked disappointed.”

Chapter XVIII

In which there is Discovered a Compunction

THE iron-gray horse—the former property of one “Miss Meely,” an existence in rumor, suspected of being quick-tempered—turned into an alley that led past the windows of the restaurant with the gilt sign to a livery stable.

The restaurant was full of the bustle of hurrying waiters and the hum of conversation. Maverig sat half-way down the line of tables, the remains of his meal before him. He was leaning back, looking peacefully at the ceiling, when Gard came, sat down at the other side of the table, and held out his hand. Maverig took his eyes from the ceiling and said, mildly, “Angel and ministers of grace! I prepared an obituary for you a month ago.” He drew a thin, bony hand from his pocket and stretched it across the table. Gard gave his order to the waiter before he commented.

“Why did you do that?”

“The Debatable Land”

“Ah! Why? If I remember the circumstances correctly they were these.”

Gard listened silently while Mavering told the story with niceties of detail. Finally he said:

“I don’t see what Map did that for.”

“Don’t you? Then neither do I, but in the highway of interpretation I should say he doesn’t like you to be alive—possibly has a grudge.”

“He must have, but I didn’t know it before.”

And later, when they were in the street that climbed to the capitol, and seemed to come to an end there, finally, in adoration of its sunlit dome, Gard asked:

“Do you know where I’m going?”

“The question offers unlimited interest. I take it to be rhetorical. I do not.”

“I’m going to look for Mrs. Mavering and a young lady who is with her. They’re nursing in one of the hospitals, or were last winter. Did you know it?”

“I did not.”

“Going with me?”

“I’ll walk along and make up my mind.”

After a few moments’ silence:

“The Debatable Land”

“It was hard luck for Mrs. Mavering to marry you.”

“You speak truth.”

“You didn’t boil down to much.”

“Blanked little. What’s your intricate meaning?”

“I was thinking of Map.”

They did not find them till the next day. There were ten or twelve hospitals in and about the city, some of them in the suburbs and far apart. Certain doctors knew the two nurses, and one directed them to a hospital which turned out to be a kind of military city with streets and sentries; but they were not there. The hospitals were all working smoothly at the time. There had been no large battle since Antietam, and there were few of those grim, dreary, and confused scenes which at times made the hospitals seem sterner battle-fields than any at the front. Nevertheless Mavering felt and expressed a sense of injury.

“You don’t mean to say I’m as tough as all this!”

“I haven’t said anything about your toughness. Maybe you are. We’ll try Mount Pleasant now. That will be the last to-night.” And they rode away from the military city.

“The Debatable Land”

“You know her,” continued Mavering. “She is what you would call, after duly considering the adjective, select. She doesn’t like realism, raw humanity, and irregular event. She desires humanity to be cooked and served in courses, even to be ordered up to the rules of art. By which figurative language I mean to say that I don’t see, that no ready interpretation presents itself, that I’m interested to know who persuaded her to take a ticket to the suburbs of hell.”

“You’ll know if we find them.”

“It was, then, this Miss?—”

“Bourn.”

“Bourn. Exactly. Of that undiscovered country. Having discovered who induced the buying of the ticket aforesaid, there remains how she did it, this Miss—a—Bourn.”

Late the following day they came to a hospital that had been a warehouse and stood on rising ground, a little back from the river, where a white steamer was lying at the wharf. There were sheds around the building, and new wooden steps built up to the door where the freight had once been discharged.

A man at the door said Mrs. Mavering and Miss Bourn were within, and took their names.

“The Debatable Land”

Beyond him they saw accurately straight rows of cots, each with a head at one end. In a few moments he came back and said the two nurses would be off duty in an hour.

They walked to and fro, past their horses fastened in one of the sheds, till the dusk grew around them. The hospital windows were lit. Lights began to gleam beyond the river and the flat lands. A mist rose and clung to the water, crouched and ghostly. There was no moon, but the stars were out, and one could hear the lapping of the cold water among the reeds. They did not see Rachel and Helen come from the wide door down the new wooden steps, or notice them till they were near, coming hooded and cloaked through the dusk.

Mavering admitted to himself a personal and direct surprise. His last memories of Rachel were of tears, and then pale dignity and a kind of fine repellence. But she did not betray the past in manner. He could not see her face.

She said:

“There will be scallops for supper, gentlemen, and then may we have your adventures?”

Mavering found himself walking beside her, and admitting his surprise to be personal and direct. Presently he picked up his fluency.

“The Debatable Land”

“I judge you would like to avoid reminiscence. In the interests of clarity and calm weather, however, allow me to say that I don’t intend to bother you; I’m a statue personifying resignation.”

“Thank you, Jack. There is where we live, Helen and I.”

It was a brick house with a white door, two slender pillars before the door, and low, pleasant windows. It overlooked the river, on which a gray layer of mist now brooded. Only a few houses were near, and a grove of trees lay beyond.

“We were in the city last winter and spring, and in another hospital, till a doctor who had charge sent us out here, in July, and found this for us. Helen looked so badly. She sympathizes so tremendously. She grew very thin and white. They don’t bring them here directly from the fields, you know. Most of them here are getting better. He said we would be quite as much use. Do you know, it is very nice to be of use.”

“Do I gather that, apart from the charm of utility—a thing that never appealed to me by its own virtue—do I correctly infer that you like it?”

“The Debatable Land”

Mrs. Mavering opened the door. The lamp in the hall shone across her face as she turned with a curious smile.

“You don’t change, do you?”

If Helen surprised Gard it was not with change, but with that same vividness of her personality; the tone of her voice, as definite as a musical theme; the swift step; the nameless something about her, impetuous, challenging, demanding, that said, “This is Helen—not a resemblance or recollection merely, but one who cannot be made another.” He was surprised by the flood of his recollections of her and by the fact that, tested by the present, they were all found to be true.

“Lady Rachel says there are scallops. It’s glorious of you to come. We know what you did in the spring, and we have a piano, but you ought to have an organ to tell about it, it’s so big. Is it fun to be a hero?”

“That’s an odd idea. I thought you might tell me who I am, or whether I’m something at all; but I don’t recognize that. Can’t you do any better?”

They followed Mavering and Rachel, and came to the white door, that stood open for them.

“The Debatable Land”

Helen looked up suddenly, but did not smile, only said :

“You’ve changed, haven’t you?”

Within he noticed Mrs. Mavering’s touch everywhere. Wherever she was, things about her seemed to alter their practical bearing and take on a difference. A plain table became luxurious by virtue of something thrown across it. A tall jar was placed on the painted mantel-piece, and the mantel-piece itself became reminiscent.

After supper, where the scallops did not fail, the four gathered before the grate. A fire crackled, and the slender jar stood above, in reminder of realms where form and color were the only deities. Gard thought Mrs. Mavering had changed. Helen’s pallor and thinness did not touch her imperative identity. Mrs. Mavering had changed less in looks than in tone. There was less languor and withdrawal. As to the relations between her and Jack, they did not seem to be uncomfortable at present, and were no business of his.

“Helen tells me I’m changed,” he said. “Do you remember the night when I came to see you instead of playing in Saint Mary’s, and Helen played she was a valiant knight

“The Debatable Land”

and you were a lady hidden in a tower, and I offered to be the ogre who was said to have a tower of his own somewhere to be proud in? It was nearly two years ago. I think the knight is still charging, and wanting to make wrong right by sticking a lance into it. But the lady has come out of her tower and gone questing with the knight, and doesn't seem quite the same. And the ogre has found the 'somewhere' of his tower even more vague than it was then, or, if he has found it, it seems to be empty. Nothing lives there but winds and ghosts now.”

“What have you been doing?” asked Helen. “We hear stories of other people, but we haven't any to tell. But I don't understand what you mean.”

“What I've been doing hasn't much to do with it. But I'll tell about that, if you like. You'd better have Mavering's first.”

“Singular anchorite!” Mavering murmured. “Why?”

“You'll tell it better.”

“Without doubt. But a reason for waiting occurs to me.”

“Don't you want to smoke?” asked Rachel, suddenly.

“The Debatable Land”

“It is not what I referred to, but it proves your knowledge that my motives are physical and uninspired.”

In Gard’s narrative there was no mention of Map, and the discovery of the first disguise was given to another source. It was told simply, rather indifferently. When it was finished Mavering remarked:

“The anchorite’s style has the classical merits of austerity.”

It was part of Mavering’s travelling-kit and baggage of the nomad, this gift of his, to be among tellers of stories, rare and excellent. For soldiers around camp-fires, old women in doorways, gentlemen at clubs and dinner-tables, newsboys in the city, school-children in the country with tin lunch-pails, farmer, tramp, hod-carrier, doctor, clergyman, black-leg, maiden in silk or gingham—it was all one; they forgot themselves and country and kin and present purpose till he was through. The “Ancient Mariner’s” spell was not peculiar to that mariner. It is more ancient than he, older than books, older than written language, older than any city in pyramid or institution, practised among hunters of wild beasts on the site of Damascus, and among those who

“The Debatable Land”

first scratched the fat soil of the Mesopotamian valley, the spell of the teller. His method is anything convenient, a ballad chanted to a harp, or a printed book. He speaks his mind and says what seems good to him as he goes, for the basis of it is the story, and the force is the force of the man. Maverig practised the primitive and personal method, and was heaven-born to it.

His narrative ran from the beginning of the summer, when he had come south as a correspondent and joined the army in the Peninsula, went on with easy gait and leaping of spaces, gave glimpses and incidents by the way, dropped out a month, fell upon the middle of September, and drew to a close.

“Wherever I went that day over the hills, behind the guns I saw that cornfield, or else where the cornfield was underneath and not to be seen itself on account of lying in the middle of explosion, with wickedness and confusion on one side, and sin and the reward thereof on the other, all blackguarding each other across it, so that it was covered with their blasphemous breath; till I had a superstition about that cornfield, and said, ‘If corn could be gathered therefrom, and corn whiskey made

“The Debatable Land”

thereof, it would be a chemical anarchy of the choicest, a combative distillation unexcelled, a superior brand of whiskey.’ It was dusk when I came to the cornfield at last, and the battle had gone to sleep in its cradle. The stretcher-men were in the corn, and they told me to ride around the edge where the mess wasn’t so thick. Their idea seemed to be good. So that I never went into that cornfield, though it was probably different from all the other cornfields, but came around into a road beyond it. There were men burning rails for camp-fires, and the woods were black, and the anchorite was strolling along, looking up at the young moon, same way he always did.”

Mavering paused a moment and puffed his cigar, took it out and looked at it, and deepened his deep voice. “I search in vain among the sere and yellow leaves of memory, whether it was ever in me to suck the end of a moonbeam in place of a cigar.”

He appealed to Rachel, who answered cheerfully and surprised him again:

“Oh yes, it was, and so it must be still.”

“He’s a hollow fraud, you know,” Gard said. “He sucks moonbeams through his

“The Debatable Land”

cigar, and puffs them out of his mouth.” And Helen gasped.

“It’s tremendous!”

But it seemed to her, putting together the two narratives, that she might make a parable. For in Mavering’s story she seemed to see colored lights flashed skilfully on a stage with curious effect, a search-light swinging its glare so that one scene after another leaped out of the dark and vanished again, a pleasure taken in the mere shift and play, the change and tumult. The narrator walked in the midst, approving of the noise, patronizing heroism and sudden death, admiring the scenic effect of the fire that splashed and scattered around him. It was all color and sound, and no real interpretation beneath. It meant nothing in the end. In Gard’s story, though the tumult was great and the dangers greater, the scenes painted clearly though more coldly, and with fewer details; yet he seemed not to care about them so, but to be looking wistfully beyond for an interpretation and not able to find it—not sure that there was one; fancying there must be, somewhere, something to make it worth while.

She sat in her old place at Mrs. Mavering’s

“The Debatable Land”

feet and turned the matter over, and thought it strange.

It surprised Gard, in watching her, that he remembered so much, so many little shining points of detail about her—as she had looked in the house, under the apse of Saint Mary’s, sitting so, in a white dress, a blue ribbon at her throat, and the fire-light shining on her yellow hair. And Mrs. Mavering used to wear dark-red dresses always, and suggest tragedy without being aware of it. They both wore black now, and starched, white aprons. Mrs. Mavering, in some inward way, seemed more cheerful, more like one gifted with health and humorous philosophy. She was astonishingly beautiful. Helen had grown white and thin. How delicate and slim the hands looked that were clasped around her knee! She used to have a sinewy grip for a girl. Everything about her declared personality. It always had, and still did. Only, something or other seemed pathetic now. Morgan Map was said to be engaged to her, and would probably boil down badly. There was pathos there. That vast primeval brute had run his neck into a noose, by-the-way, only it would not do to string him up if she cared for him, though it might be a blessing

“The Debatable Land”

to her in the long run. Mrs. Mavering might have an opinion on that. What Map's grudge may have been did not seem to Gard of any great interest. He had had trouble with him once about some commissary. Morgan had looked murder, and uttered white-hot language, and Gard had “corralled” the commissary. The man must have a grisly disposition if that were his “grudge.”

Thinking of Map, then, his big, harsh-boned face, mighty hands, massiveness, and “grisly disposition,” he glanced at Helen again, winced, and started.

The shock went shivering through flesh and bone. It hurt. He said, aloud, “Oh, that won't do!”

He found himself on his feet, and the others looking surprised.

The piano suggested an excuse, and he sprang across the room.

“I haven't touched one in a year.”

But his fingers trembled on the keys. He had not seen his nerve shaken like that since his first battle, which opened for him with a shell bursting in a mud-bank. It plastered him with mud, stood him on his head, and shook his nerve admirably.

“The Debatable Land”

But this—Morgan Map—Helen—the pathos of it—the hideous incongruity—the beast and the pit and our Lady of Pity and Purity! Oh, Madonna, over the altar of a little white-washed chapel, at whose tender feet men poured out daily the passion of their souls like water! Years, years, so many years ago, and one Gard Windham creeping into the empty chapel at dawn, sobbing for the nameless heartache and the groping loneliness, and Madonna was over the altar, pale-faced, in silver-and-blue robe, who whispered to his sobbing prayer, “The organ! play!” Then he played and forgot in the gray dawn, till the chapel was full of presences, and the *bonus Deus* came behind the altar and agreed with Our Lady to be kind to Gard, and not let his sins frighten him too badly. How he loved her then—Madonna! *That* was Gard Windham! He was real! What was he now? Swept down under the years, the thinking and working, the flood waves of the big world—and now—Morgan Map! “I haven’t prayed in long, Madonna, but she’s too slim and brave and yellow-haired, and made from the beginning of her days to be blessed and guarded from the slime and stain, the red-eyed animal and the pitiless fist,”

“The Debatable Land”

It was worse—why, Mavering had points of decency, and, besides, Mrs. Mavering was not—“I haven’t prayed, Madonna. I don’t know where you are. But call the *bonus Deus*, for the beast climbs the stars. *Ora pro nobis*, for Helen—for me. Or save the girl, and let me go. It doesn’t matter.”

He felt that he had never played before like that night. The piano seemed to tremble under the fingers, to thud and flash, and the old fire flooded his nerves.

He stumbled blindly on the way to the shed where the horses were fastened.

“Do something for me, Jack. Tell Mrs. Mavering about that Map business. Tell her she must save that girl. It won’t do.”

“What in—what’s your intricate meaning?”

“Map, man! He has a hold on her. You see what he is.”

“I do not. But I see—I begin to have a glimmer as to—in fact, I take it you have an underhold, anchorite. Go in and win.”

“I don’t know what you mean,” said Gard, dully.

“What are you going to do?”

“It doesn’t matter. I am going to throw my furlough and join the army.”

“The Debatable Land”

“When?”

“To-morrow.”

Maving whistled, and then swore softly.

“Why?”

“I’m no better than you are. What business have you and I in heaven with our damned private job politics? Haven’t you learned that yourself?”

They rode away towards the city, and separated at a corner lit dimly by a street lamp. Gard put his horse to a gallop and clattered away.

Chapter XIX

In which Windham Drops Out of the Fight — and
Mavering Remarks on Human Adaptability

THERE was a steep hill-side, and below it a swift river, on the left the little village of Falmouth huddled in a gully, and beyond the village a higher hill, with a white house on the crest. Across the river, and farther down, the town of Fredericksburg was on fire in places, ruins here and there smoking lazily. From the town it was half a mile of meadow-land, hollowed and hillocked but flat in its main result, to the line of low hills, where the smoke rested thick and white, and the artillery did not rest at all, but growled and yelled unpacified. Certain regiments had watched since noon from this hill, seen column after column go over the dipping meadows, and sometimes a half, sometimes a third, come back. About four they marched down through the huddled village, crossed on a pontoon bridge into Fredericksburg, and drew up beyond the town.

“The Debatable Land”

The shells shrieked over them. One exploded against a little wooden shanty, scattering splinters and dust. Two or three men dropped. One of them sat up at Gard's feet and rubbed his face.

“Are you hurt?”

“No, I'm scared.”

“That's nothing.”

“No, that's nothing.”

The little cabin took fire. The flames crept up the dry, worm-eaten boards. The men turned and watched them.

A young lieutenant, who was small, and had a round, jolly face, came and walked beside Gard.

“You see, those other fellows seemed to lose about two-thirds; so a fellow will be pretty apt to go in and stay there. About two to one.”

“About that. But the old man might mean somebody to go in and stay there alive. He might have that idea. Yours isn't inspiring.”

“Oh, I only meant—I was thinking you might let my people know if I'm potted.”

“All right.”

“I'll do the same if—”

“The Debatable Land”

“No matter, Billy. I haven’t any. Look out for your end men. They’re nervous.”

In a few moments the column was gone, scurrying away over hollows and flat stretches. Gard lay on his face near the stone foundations and smoking ashes of a barn in a field. “Out of this fight,” he thought, and turned over. His muscles seemed to have all become dissolved and loose. He lifted the edge of his coat and looked under. “It looks like a bad one.” The blood did not flow steadily, but leaped and was bright red. “It ought to be picked up. It is an artery. If I knew how I might pick it up!” It was a slanting trench, indefinitely deep, and pumping up blood from the bottom. There must be smashed bone in it somewhere. You could tell from the slant the direction of the point where the shell had burst. Two other men lay near by, one of them still living, but with the top of his head crushed; he was kicking a hole in the ground with his heel.

“I might try.”

He made an effort, and in a moment his hands dropped back on the grass again, hands red, wet, and feeble. The immense noise of the cannonading became a hum in his ears and then was silent. A little white cloud in the

“The Debatable Land”

sky seemed to spread over the blue and turn gray. He closed his eyes.

It would be like this, after all. It had always seemed a difficulty, a knotted problem that speculation could not untie. It did not seem like a knot or a difficulty now, but more like a solution, a smoothing, a quiet explanation. One thought life so difficult and death the hardest knot in its logic, but if one found death to be the answer instead of the worst difficulty, looked upon in that way it might even seem to be a simple answer. A gradual oblivion—not exactly that—a blending of noises into chords and glassy harmonies—it was more like that.

The noises of the field were all gone, and there was no more earth or sky, no men visible running past with rifles, no roar, echo, concussion, nor moan of the flying missiles. But the silent vacancy was filling again with other forms and sounds, whispering voices, faces that leaned and smiled, others that threatened, some that turned from him and cried out and fled. One of those that fled was the Father Superior. One of those that leaned and smiled was Helen. But there did not appear any reason for either, unless the Father Superior might

“The Debatable Land”

be frightened at seeing what a lost soul looked like face to face. Helen wore a broad, white collar. Afterwards she came again with a blue ribbon around her neck, dressed in white, looking fragile, and said, “I’ll fight for you; I don’t care who they are.” Who were “they”? Most of the forms were strangers, but Fritz Moselle sat at a cloudy organ that pealed with thunder and shot lightning from the top of its precipice of pipes. And he played till the yellow stars jumped down and sang anthems, and Mavering came stalking after them, saying, “They are an interesting and peculiar people on that secular comet up there, and the best liars I know; in the pursuit of which interest, O Fritz, I’m going to pick up my kit and go back.” Mrs. Mavering would not go, and Madonna said, “Be kind to Gard,” to the *bonus Deus*, who seemed puzzled. Helen came and sobbed over him and stretched out her hands. He caught at them, missed, and fell several years through spaces and spaces. Innumerable faces were plastered against the sides of the pit, innumerable lips cried to him, but he thought, “They all have issues of their own.” A great voice, heavy, stolid, and cold, called, “Eternity around, divinity within,”

“The Debatable Land”

but no one really agreed with it. A gust of wind drove down the pit and blew him like a dried leaf, while he cried out helplessly, and fled another year before the wind, till a slim hand gripped his wrist and stopped him. The grip was sinewy. The gusts and the stolid voice went driving past them down the pit. It was useless to count the faces plastered against the sides. He could not raise his hands; to raise his eyelids was a dragging effort, sad and slow. It was night. The air was damp and cold. They were carrying him on a stretcher. Their steps sounded on the pontoon bridge. The water rippled below, or else it was the rain beating on the tent, murmuring, murmuring. Helen was saying “You *must* stay,” and held his wrist, and he said, “I never saw anything make up its mind the way you do,” so that they both laughed, and the pit echoed like a bass drum which made them laugh more, and then echoed with infinite thrilling moans which frightened them. And he whispered in the darkness, “It’s fun we’re in the same pit,” and she whispered back, “Yes, gorgeous.”

“It fills me with benignant admiration”—so

“The Debatable Land”

reads one of Maverick's articles, dated “This 21st of December, one mile, possibly two—Heaven help us and call it three—from the Rappahannock,” and entitled “Illustrated Speculations”—“It fills me with benignant admiration, this human adaptability. I have seen to-day the troops returning from what they called, with apparent justice, ‘The Mud March,’ a futile procession, with no other result than mud. For all night had the wind howled, the rain smitten them compositely with sleet and snow; they had splashed since dawn in profound mud, and are now partially dried and partially comfortable in ingenious ways, but in the main still wearing mud, finding themselves adaptable to mud, arguing that mud adds a certain density to clothing, a casing and protection to the features against the atmospheric and social hostility of Virginia. I have seen the author of *Leaves of Grass* in a brigade hospital camp, holding the hand of a bearded, piratical-looking stranger from Michigan, who will die to-night and without doubt adapt himself to whatever shall be his lot. But this poet and tilter at conventions—what convention he is tilting at now seems obscure, what poetry he meditates with lines

“The Debatable Land”

of ungainly sprawl. I merely record that he sits in a brigade hospital tent, holding the hand, hour after hour, of one whom he knows not from mythical Adam, proving himself, I infer, in his own way adaptable. I have seen one Captain Windham, of the 3d Regiment, —, a man known to me these half-dozen years, a suggestive person with a problematical mind, musician and scout, bred in a monastery, and tending speculatively God knows where, but likely, from his looks, to be presently disembodied and ‘blown with restless violence about the pendent world,’ a condition to which, I believe profoundly, he will readily adapt himself. He lies pumped empty of blood, and with a shell wound more or less terrific, in the tent where sits the author of *Leaves of Grass*. The rain beats slowly on the tent. I see the dim shining thereof, and of other tents around it, lantern-lit. Under the high floor of a house-porch I feed a fire surreptitiously with the lattice-work, and look out into the night, and consider the life of man, its beautiful inconsequence. It is as good a place as any other, this sub-portican retreat in the midnight pause of bellowing war. It serves me and the time. Have I not lived? Have I not slept in fine linen

“The Debatable Land”

and stridden a horse, and looked into eyes that smiled for me, and had a bullet hole through my hat, and bowed from a platform to a sea of faces? And were they any better, intrinsically, than this? Why, then, my mud-encased and mud-protected soldiery, my Michigan pirate, my monastery-bred visionary and scholastic adventurer, both of the latter now floating on the edge of the downward-and-gone, my poet of catalogues and statistics in defiant metre, preacher of the gospel of muscular affection, now practising that gospel—we are all, I conclude, doing very well where we are. Human adaptability! Or is it in some measure a fluid type peculiar to this continent?

“Enters here one with shoulder-straps and an ill-conditioned face, which he pokes in and inquires curiously, ‘Why I am burning up a house full of patients?’ In reply, ‘If I were burning up a house, without doubt there would be reasons. But I distinguish, I am not burning up a house, but lighting a torch of intelligence for a public in the dark. Remarking, ‘Oh! You’re smoking up through the floor of the porch. Look out!’ he withdraws.

“Which reminds me to go up the river tomorrow and find the end of a telegraph wire

“The Debatable Land”

that is approachable and unabsorbed by the military.

“A singular convocation of atoms is this same war, wherein atomic egoism is at times the more violently asserted, and again disturbed and modified. The semi-translucent but resisting barrier that separates the human atom from the human atom is assaulted and impinged against almost to penetration or shattering. In this upheaval atoms tend back to inorganic unity. The roots of existence are exposed, the primeval reappears. Nevertheless I have not seemed anywhere more ‘an individual and an egoist,’ to quote the problematical musician, than now, sheltered here from the sombre rain, burning another man’s green lattice-work for private comfort, and possessed of an occurrent idea or desire, if it were possible, to inquire of this Windham how fares his individual egoism, and whether the adventure apparently before him is, in his opinion, one worthy of a sportsman.

“The scripture of the immortal bard mentions a ‘thrilling region of thick-ribbed ice.’ Imagination suggests an acclimatization of the disembodied essence to Arctic needs, some ingenious utilization of Northern Lights, and

“The Debatable Land”

confesses its suggestions feeble. My imagination is not what it once was. Gray hairs of me display their tenuous forewarning. ‘The times are waxing late.’ Without pretending a polemical interest in this war, I have candidly to state that it looks to me like both engines in the ditch. ‘The jig,’ in the stately words of Job, ‘is about up.’ The rain echoes that oracular opinion, and the brigade hospital tents glimmer distantly, where lies that problematical cross-breed of a monastery and later conditions, where sits the author of *Leaves of Grass* hour after hour, holding the hand of a piratical stranger from Michigan.”

Chapter XX

Treats of Further Incidents in the House with the White Door

THE mud on the suburban road sucked about the feet of Mavering's horse. So he came again at night to the hospital above the river and to the brick house with the white door and pillars. Another horse was fastened at the gate. A fat, grinning negro woman opened the door, and when he entered the room, Helen started forward with an exclamation, a red spot on each cheek that did not belong there; Rachel smiled graciously and came towards him in the manner of polished and experienced hospitality; and the man who stood backed against the chimney-piece, his shoulders covering half of it and looking as massive as the brickwork, was Morgan Map. He gathered his yellow eyebrows at seeing Mavering, moved, swayed an instant, then clicked his teeth and waited stiffly with back set to the brick-work.

"Ah, captain!"

“The Debatable Land”

Morgan growled something indistinguishable. Mavering's wide mouth had on its widest smile, and in his soul was pleasure and appreciation.

“We have here,” he thought, “a tidy little game.”

He sat down and described the late battle, and considered. Morgan finally took his hat.

“Are you going into the city, Mavering?”

“Don't wait for me. Oh! It occurs to me—that paper you lost, containing, you recollect, certain specifications, was captured and went South.” He had the thread of his fluency in hand now. “The object for which it appeared to have been drawn up was, as perhaps you have heard”—a pause—“not entirely attained, and I don't know that it may not itself have been destroyed. Probably not. At any rate, witnesses could be found down there in time, affidavits and so on, as to what it contained and the circumstances of its—its loss, which contents and circumstances and their purport are only known to you, to me, and to the person to whom the specifications referred. I propose, if you don't mind, to make Mrs. Mavering a fourth.”

“You'd better ride into the city with me.”

“The Debatable Land”

“I should be pleased to oblige you, but it’s not my funeral. I have my own obsequies in process. Why make myself likely to become a secondary corpse at another man’s?”

“Then I’d like a few minutes’ talk.”

“Another time. My dear sir, why worry? why be anxious? You can’t do otherwise than exactly as you may be requested.”

“That means there must be a deal,” said Morgan, simply. “All right.”

Mavering thought, “Blanked if I don’t admire him!” and said: “Not a deal—rather, I imagine, a surrender to stated terms.”

“Where are you staying?” Morgan asked.

“Oh, never mind about me. I have that singular dislike just mentioned to the rôle of a secondary corpse. But let me suggest specifically that you might come out here in the course of your convenience and receive from Mrs. Mavering what we will call, perhaps, advice. My opinion is that it will be the—let us say—advice which you’ll have to follow; but, of course, your own judgment, sagacity, talents for strategic combination—believe me, I have the highest admiration for them—will be the best of guides.”

Morgan said, “All right,” quite simply, and

“The Debatable Land”

Mavering again thought, “Blanked if I don’t admire him!” admiring him, perhaps personally, at least dramatically, out of his own fund of appreciation for things that were fit and consistent. The massive simplicity of Morgan, the primitive unscrupulousness, the bulk and unity of desire in him, the shape and size and weight of bone, all seemed to fit together. He was not problematical—at least, not divided—not, in latter-day terms, “differentiated”—within himself. “I suppose I know what Mrs. Mavering would say. She needn’t bother,” Morgan continued, and stooped and kissed Helen, who seemed to droop under his touch. Mavering admired him without interruption. “A pyramid, an Assyrian bas-relief, a stately savage unsophisticated by altruism and the Ten Commandments. I’d give something to know what he is going to do. What *can* he do?” He thought he would take any reasonable odds that Helen loved this one rather than the problematical anchorite, and would not give him up. In that case what would Rachel do? The anchorite might be gone on his disembodied adventure by this time, neither capable of nor interested in doing anything mundane. But when Morgan was gone, and Helen, looking

“The Debatable Land”

up suddenly, asked, “Have you seen Gard?” the progress of his speculation turned with abrupt angle.

“Good God! I apologize! I’ve seen him since the battle, Miss Bourn, but had no conversation.”

Helen was silent, and Rachel said:

“But you and Captain Map were very mysterious.”

“True, without doubt it seemed so.” He paused, studied the ceiling a moment, and continued: “Map allowed a paper to fall into the hands of the enemy, which accidentally did no harm, but in which unscrupulous and self-seeking parties might find opportunity to make him trouble. I should not say that he was at fault on a point of carelessness. In fact, the plan, in a way, was admirable. I observe that the night is brilliant and picturesque. If Mrs. Maverick will walk out with me, wherever the ground is not intolerably sloppy, I will leave with her a hint which she may deliver to Map, if he calls for it, and may indicate the substance of it to Miss Bourn, if she sees fit.”

Rachel put her cloak on and the two went out, leaving Helen before the fire. She leaned

“The Debatable Land”

her head on one hand so that her fingers were pushed into her hair; the other hung over the arm of the chair, and looked slight, listless, and pathetic.

The white steamer lay at the wharf, almost ready for departure. Mavering broke the silence.

“I endeavor earnestly to become interested in another man’s obsequies. I fail. Do I go back to the city to-night, Rachel, a pariah, settled in my caste? The question has more to me than an academic interest. If I go, it will be something in the mood to find satisfaction in meeting and doing vicious gun practice with Morgan Map, who is presumed to be waiting in a solitary place a quarter of a mile down the road. Possibly he is not. I don’t know what his game will be.”

Rachel had shrunk back when he began, and now stood still.

“You promised me—you said—”

“Very likely; the promise is broken.”

A board fence was beside the road; she clung to it and shivered with the old, half-forgotten terror.

“There was something else you were to tell me,” she said at last. He told her briefly the

“The Debatable Land”

incident of the dropped paper, and concluded: “It’s no concern of mine, or yours, unless you’re interested in this girl, who appears to be the singularly efficient motive, of the state of whose affections I am not informed. One of the last things that Windham said to me was to tell you about it and tell you to save the girl, meaning, I take it, with more precision of phrase, that you are to shunt Map into the ditch, which you evidently can do if you want to. No doubt, it will be my matrimonial duty to help, though the ethical side of matrimony you wouldn’t expect to appeal to me. No more it does. Is there any side that appeals to you? What are you afraid of?”—with sudden savagery—“of me? Keep your disgust to yourself, then, till I’m gone. I’ll get Map strung up if you like, or shot, or blotted out by persuasion. Windham’s probably dead, and doesn’t care. Map’s a damned scoundrel like me, and a deal more concentrated. As for—”

Rachel caught his arm and stared up at him:

“Gard! What do you mean?”

And Mavering laughed.

“Gard, is it? This little melodrama is well done. Exit John Mavering into the jaws of

“The Debatable Land”

hell. What comes next? My pearl of a wife, my gentle and frightened dove, *will* you kindly state what you are up to?”

“It’s Helen—”

“Helen! Helen, avaunt! I’m done.”

“Oh, Jack, it all depends on him! Don’t you see?”

“I see you care much for Windham, and perhaps yon girl with the yellow hair, and have a sensitive dislike for me. Gods! she’s pretty, yon girl, but she ought to be fatter. I don’t know whether Windham’s dead or not, but he looked like a consumptive plaster-cast when I saw him—been ploughed and harrowed by a shell and made ready to be planted for immortality, I inferred, but didn’t inquire. What do I care for him or the said girl who is pretty but should be fatter? What do I care for you? I don’t know. But if you propose matrimony for the two, I’ll go so far in friendship as to tell him he’d much better be planted. Am I such slime to your cultured taste? Say so, then, and, by God! you’ve seen the last of me.”

Rachel recovered herself. She still held his arm. She pressed nearer and was silent a moment. The steamer below the bank was

“The Debatable Land”

brightly lit, the docks bustling and noisy. “You needn’t go. Come and help me, and ask what you like. I think you love me a little. Perhaps I was wrong in the beginning.”

They went back towards the house. Mavering admitted a degree of bewilderment. When Rachel was in a state of self-possession, it was difficult not to feel inferior. There were times—moments of weakness—when Mavering confessed a sensation towards her, never elsewhere directed, and which might be called respect—a hesitation, a summons somehow to draw back the great muddy river of event as well as the confluent stream of his own imperturbable comment, to turn them aside from pouring over her. It must have cost time and selection to make Rachel, and the Mississippi lacked discrimination.

Helen sat as before, listlessly. Rachel knelt beside her and whispered. Helen started; the listless hand gripped the arm of the chair with a vigor that tore the cushion. She broke from Rachel’s arms.

“Where is he?”

“Gods!” murmured Mavering, in deprecation. “This race of women! About six miles back of the Creek landing.”

“The Debatable Land”

“The steamer goes out at ten. Pack a basket, Rachel.”

Helen left the room with a rush. Mavering looked after her with wakened interest. “Who and what is this?” Rachel came to him and pleaded.

“I owe her everything. You left me so desperate—”

“I left you? I seem to have forgotten that.”

“I thought there was nothing more for me. She brought me to life again. Help her, Jack. I think we can neither of us change. I think it will be the old story again. But I’ll try.”

Mavering looked down and felt a touch of compunction curious to himself.

“I suppose the anchorite was correct—problematical, but accurate. I don’t carry your price. You’re too expensive for me. As to the anchorite, I’ll find him and bring him back, dead or alive. That’s cheap, but the rest of it is expensive.”

A half hour later the white steamer was ploughing down the river. Mavering, in the long, nearly empty cabin, stretched himself on a sofa, denounced the execrable taste of steamboat furnishing, and went philosophically to sleep. Helen, on the upper deck, stared at the starlit Virginia shore.

Chapter XXI

In Which We Go Down the River and Return

A LOUD wind blew up the river, cold, sombre, insistent. The river seemed to tremble in waves and shiver in wrinkles under the monotonous threatening of the wind, the stars to be fretful in their bleak spaces. "Forever is a long time." Helen wrapped her cloak more closely.

"Dead!" The wind stated it coldly, insistently, and did not mind how fiercely she denied it. It was only the surface of the river that trembled and glimmered so. The inevitable reality was the current below—dark, steady, and leading downward to that sea from which the cold wind came with insistent statement. If men and women were incidents to powers beneath and influences over them, like the myriad tiny flickers born of coincidences between the divinity of the stars and the toil of the river; if one only carried for a short time this little torch of courage in a night

“The Debatable Land”

without horizon; and behind the surface of things “their substance and third dimension,” in Gard’s phrase, stretched away into a ghostly distance; yet it was inborn in Helen to carry her torch high, to lay lance in rest and challenge the ghostliest shadow in sight, to be herself personal and definite, to accuse even abstractions of personality, to make a vivid world of nearby things and live vividly within it.

In that world, life had seemed mainly to consist of purpose and achievement; but on the wide river between the crouching shores that night—with the wind calling continually, “Dead, dead”—wishes, resolves, and actions to follow them, how shrunken and chilled they seemed, if one were only an accidental wrinkle on the river, possibly a glimmer if a star happened to look that way!

“It is not true!” She went in and saw lamps swinging the length of the saloon, where men were asleep on the sofas and the floor.

The engines throbbed and the paddle-wheels creaked and splashed near the window of her state-room. She lay awake, and yet seemed to hear sounds like a moaning organ, to see Gard’s face floating, white and motionless, in

“The Debatable Land”

black water, and moving down seaward with a tide that she tried to block with her hands. She started up, choking and sobbing, and heard the engines throb, the paddle-wheel creak and splash.

It was still dark when the steamer drew in to a wharf. Lights were moving about. There were three or four houses, a flag flapping sulkily in the wind, a train of cars and a puffing engine, a line of black bluffs against the sky. It was misty dawn when the train started south, and full sunrise when she stepped from the train with Maverick and saw a house with high porch on a hill; below, near a grove, the brigade hospital tents. The big, hurrying surgeon said: “Move him! Good God!—I beg your pardon—yes. It’s run mighty low. It needs warming and coaxing. There’s da—I beg your pardon—there’s very little of either here. This is the first time in six weeks the army of the Potomac has had any luck, to my knowledge.” He looked at Helen suddenly, dropped his gallantry, and continued, gravely: “As to the chances, since you ask me, I suspect there are complications. But as an alternative to nights as cold as this, I should say, do almost anything.” A moment’s silence, and

“The Debatable Land”

he went on: “They lie around here, about five hundred to an acre, several acres of them. That’s the trouble. However, I knew Captain Windham. I admired him—this is the tent. I hope you have everything you need. Give him brandy and milk. The train goes back about eight. Good-bye.” The big surgeon hurried away.

Mavering stepped in behind her, looked around, and said: “Exactly. The pirate’s gone.” Helen did not hear him. A pile of straw and some blankets, a black cloak, the white face against it, like one drowned and going seaward with a tide. She dropped on her knees and bent over it. “Will you get the things,” she half whispered, looking around—“a stretcher and some men? Please take my purse and come back in time for the train.”

Mavering went out. In the way of descriptive adjectives he thought “fierce” was the word. She looked “fierce.” “And,” he reflected, “I dare say a man may turn out a domestic cat if he were half drowned and properly stroked and not too old. *Quien sabe?* If the anchorite comes to, I’m gambling my gray hairs he’s tamed. Gray hairs are distinctly a misfortune.”

“The Debatable Land”

Helen leaned close over. The “must” and “shall” that absorbed her seemed straining at her eyes and lips. She felt as if she were lifting a weight. “You *must*, Gard, you *must* stay”—struggling to keep the white face from going down in the suck of an undertow, drawn under by some blind power that knew no measures of values or who loved and remembered and who forgot.

Measure of values! Your bullet goes forth in a pointed manner, appears to be determined, purposeful, greatly in earnest, and buries itself in a sand-bank, or the brain of a scholar—all one to the bullet, all one to the rifleman who knows nothing of the matter, all one to the per cent. of averages, to the flowing laws and far-off events of the universe.

“But you *must*, Gard, you *must* stay.” So tiny a torch to shake with such insistence at the wide night and call on its hurrying storms to stop! Enter demurral and private petition to those high courts and abstract legislatures! “The constitution does not provide for you in person.”

“Then amend it. It should. It does me wrong. What are laws for if not for justice?”

“They are not at the call of human justice.”

“The Debatable Land”

“Ah, then, not justice! But have pity, or forget and go by! Only let me keep him. I love him. I will not let him go.”

The protest seems almost as persistent as the law. After all, it might be itself a law or an amendment in process of making, this protest. But if Gard Windham should not go on that adventure and exploration, inferred by Maverig to be, perhaps, Arctic in character, and should linger back to life in the course of event and not by virtue of an amendment, probably Helen would not care how it came about.

She did not care how the men with the stretcher looked, how they took off their caps or whispered. The moving train and the steamboat were vague things aside. Both were crowded, but no one spoke to her. It seemed to be arranged, recognized, and admitted.

A group gathered about Maverig on deck, who said: “Why, it appears to me a situation that doesn’t admit of remark. It looks like a case of stand off and clear the road. It has that distinguished appearance.” And there was a murmur of assent.

The wounded, sitting or lying about on both decks and in the cabin, were wretched and

“The Debatable Land”

sinister sights. Some babbled in delirium; a few, like Gard, were sunk in torpor, unconscious of their issues. The steamer ploughed through splashing and gurgling water. The driven, wintry clouds streamed across the sky, gray and ragged as battle-torn banners. Hawks floated over the river, graceful in their savage hunt over the double-decked steamer loaded with human pain bound for the hospitals. And Helen noticed and remembered nothing of it. She seemed to herself more like a ghost alone with Gard, who was another ghost. Empty space was around them, the existence of both so tenuous that it consisted only of the faint pulse-beat in his wrist, which she held. This beat was the measure of the flight of time, and the slender thread that bound the world together. It used to seem to her that Gard was too intangible, almost unreal. One could not say what he was like. What did he mean by: “I don’t care whether I’m an admirable person or not; I’m a partially illuminated point, floating along I don’t know where or why. What’s the use of caring? There’s too much before and after”? Or: “Every one lives in a dungeon; he doesn’t know any other dungeon than his own”? And when he used to play

“The Debatable Land”

the organ in Saint Mary's and fill the great church with mystical voices, he had seemed to her something not of the daily world, but of a world partly like the one in which she built her own fanciful castles; only it was wider and more peculiar, and the powers in it were strong and strange. However apart from Gard himself her idea of him may have been, it was one which this long watch beside him, the touch of the slow pulse, and the knowledge of how closely he now at least moved along the frontier of shadows, only made more intimate. The organ was not needed to interpret him. She felt that she knew what he was like. She thought the pulse-beat spoke, as the organ used to speak, with the same swift, immediate presence, and that, when she whispered “*You must stay,*” it throbbed an answer: “*You mean, come back. You've no idea how far it is down here, and very curious. But maybe I can, if you'll hold your end of whatever it is.*” And so the crowd and the murmur, the babbling in delirium of the man on the next stretcher, the laboring of the steamer ploughing up stream, the passing of hours, all seemed moved apart from her. Sometimes the distant consciousness would seem to almost or quite

“The Debatable Land”

return, and look out at her under wavering eye-lashes. The lips moved, and she fancied they said, “I knew you were there.” She became aware, at the same time, that the steamer had stopped, that the stretchers were being carried out in procession, and that over her stood Maving, Rachel, and Thaddeus Bourn; and of these she was hardly aware enough to be surprised at Thaddeus. When they came to the house with the white door, and he drew her aside a moment, she half resisted in a dazed way, and felt as if not to be close to Gard were against nature and reason. Thaddeus drew her into the sitting-room. The men had carried Gard to the room beyond. They had set down the stretcher and were moving him.

“In point of fact,” began Thaddeus, “I’ve come to take you home. Your mother is—a—not so well. I fear it is quite serious. I wrote you, but it did not at that time seem serious. A woman of astonishing placidity, my dear, which I have sometimes felt tempted to recommend, in fact, to your imitation. But the circumstances are such now that it would not, I might say, be in good taste. Her condition is, I regret to say—seems to be—but perhaps to-morrow.”

“The Debatable Land”

He was not sure she heard him.

“Oh yes, to-morrow.”

To-morrow might be what it liked if he would let her go now. She slipped away. The men came out and left the house. Rachel followed with Mavering and closed the door. After a time Thaddeus said:

“Relative to a certain estate, Mrs. Mavering, in which you and I made investments, undertook a trusteeship, has it not, in your opinion, been administered somewhat—a—speculatively? It appears to me to be loaded, I might say, with liabilities. I do not see that the—a—securities are ascertained.”

“Oh! but I think he will get well.”

“Granted—and then?”

“He *must* care for her.”

“Granted—a—it would seem probable, and then?”

He deliberately refrained from looking at Mavering, who was examining Thaddeus, his gold-rimmed glasses and accurate tailoring, with speculative interest.

“I doubt whether you can argue from me,” said Mavering, serenely. Rachel flushed and Thaddeus protested.

“Oh, I beg—”

“The Debatable Land”

“Not at all. It is admitted that the garb of civil society has never fitted me. Any coat will go on me, but none will fit to the satisfaction of fashion. But as to the anchorite, I would not argue a parallel. I suspect he will cut his coat to newer fashions than mine—possibly than yours. My dear sir, I’m an egoist and you’re an egoist.”

“True,” murmured Thaddeus, “a social egoist.”

Mavering stopped long enough to reflect that he liked this Thaddeus Bourn, a man apparently with conversations in him.

“Very good. And so it occurs to me in passing that I may be the more elementary, anterior type; and, say, Morgan Map, a still further elementary, anterior, antediluvian—”

“Excellent!” cried Thaddeus; “excellent choice of phrase! My idea exactly! I said a primary, primitive, primordial.”

“Good words, all of them—descriptive and discreet.”

The two smiled at each other with appreciation.

“Map might do,” continued Mavering, “if he had all the room there was. He needs more room, properly for his state of culture, even

“The Debatable Land”

than I do. Now the anchorite—I refer to Captain Windham—is, if an egoist, possibly a fourth kind; I am inclined to think—to question—whether we might not argue him even in advance in continuance of this theory, which, I perceive you agree with me, is not without interest.”

“But,” said Thaddeus, distinguishing, marking precision with his eye-glass, held between two fingers, “as regards, now, a definition.”

“I leave it to your more discriminating choice. I contribute this observation, however, that when the anchorite wants more room he is apt to climb into the air for it, instead of quarrelling with his neighbors on the earth.”

Mavering took his leave. Rachel went to the window and stood looking after him. Thaddeus polished his glasses, and thought that Mavering was evidently a man with conversation in him.

Chapter XXII

Of Mavering, Who Disappears—Of the Gray Poet—Of
Morgan, Who Appears Once More

WHEN Gard returned to the knowledge of the light, he brought with him the impression that Helen was near. It was an irritating shock not to find her. He remembered a number of widely separated moments when he had been conscious of physical things—unless all these were vagrant dreams: the rain on the tent, the surgeon, the bitter cold, and Helen sitting there holding his wrist. The last was a portrait without surroundings or background. Her hair was pushed away from her forehead, and her eyes had seemed to probe and search for him down wherever he was lost.

Mrs. Mavering sat beside him now. She shook her head to signify silence when he wished to say something, to question her about this doubt; so that he fell to staring at the ceiling and trying to work his brain. How slowly the ideas moved, how reluctant they

“The Debatable Land”

were, how pale and unsuggestive! To remember something was to pull a long, sagging rope, until at last the remembrance would emerge from a tideless, flat sea in a drowned condition. It was exasperating of Helen not to be there. The exasperation lasted four months.

The days and weeks slipped by, marked less by nights and days than by bits of information given and assimilated at intervals. He learned where he was and how he came there, and brooded over the subject, turned it slowly in his mind, and concluded to go on turning it. It had innumerable sides, surfaces, depths—some that were astonishing, some that melted into day dreams. It seemed to him that he was on the way to recover in time—a doctor, in fact, with side whiskers, gray and pendent, came periodically, and stated as much in a loud voice, and in that case he was glad that life looked interesting and came towards him with shining approach. The winter sunlight falling through clear panes under white, translucent curtains was as if newly washed.

It is said that the secret of the strong, temperate zones lies in their winter and spring, the antiseptic storms, the trance, and burial, and then the cleansed revival, the issues of a

“The Debatable Land”

fresh seed-time. And there appear to be certain bitter waters, flowing near the roots of existence, in which, if it so happens to a man, he may wash his eyes clear of confusion, and afterwards wonder how it came that he was once weary of living. So it seemed to Gard that he had gone around a circle and begun a new season of expectation. He was that black-robed acolyte again, slim and somewhat pale, who, in breathless eagerness to see and know, had come out of the door of the brotherhood's brick-walled court-yard into the hurrying avenue, hearing the high fluting, “Follow, follow,” looking for a banner and sword and shield, possibly for a girl in the brakes with sunlight on her hair, at least for something he had not tried to explain to the Father Superior. Whatever his motives and purposes then, they had become clouded since, and were clear again, and calling, “It is time to be alive and out among the melodies.” It was good—the mere living; a handsomely furnished world, with a number of things in it.

Mrs. Maverick went away in the late winter. Widow Bourn died in January, when wild winds and snows were beating against the

“The Debatable Land”

combative little church, and Helen was alone in the cottage, except for an elderly woman, depressed and angular, in the kitchen. Helen refused to go to Thaddeus, to his bewildered disgust. Mrs. Mavering, for some reason, did not think the refusal strange, but she became intent for the North as soon as she heard it.

“May I come, too, Lady Rachel? I mean when this mossy-whiskered physician unties me.”

“May!” she said, scornfully. “You must. Where else should you go?”

“It’s queer, but it seems like home, Hagar. I never saw it. Wasn’t Hagar the mother of homeless Ishmaelites?”

So Mrs. Mavering was gone. One Sabrina, a fat negro woman, was left, who shook the floor with her tread, who wore extraordinary green kerchiefs on her head, and exploded in a melting gobble of mirth at Gard’s every remark, till humor became a burden and he tried depression. “I shall die, Sabrina.” Sabrina gobbled with joy. He tried wrath. “You’re a galoop, Sabrina, a galoop!”—and Sabrina spilled his coffee over her billows of delight.

Mavering appeared and disappeared, brought

“The Debatable Land”

with him once a big, deep-breathing man, slightly singular in dress, with a blown, gray beard and hair, soft eyes, and affectionate, impulsive ways. Maverig introduced him.

“He calls himself a poet, not a Plesiosaurus. His poetry looks as if it were written, nevertheless, by a saurian with one of his fins. I recommend you two to mutual and plastic embraces.” Afterwards the gray man came often of himself, and would sit by the bedside, holding Gard’s white, bony fingers, and recite:

“ Out of the cradle endlessly rocking—”

“ . . . do I not see my love fluttering out there among
the breakers ?

What is that little black thing I see there in the
white ?”

Or, “The Song of Myself”—

“A child said, ‘What is the grass?’ fetching it to
me with full hands.”

They grew suddenly friendly and confident, and talked art and letters. “Some of that is good stuff,” Gard remarked, “and it’s all yeasty—something stirring in it. But I don’t see— Here, you’re an egoist, too—you simply whoop with it—and impartially affection-

“The Debatable Land”

ate at the same time as a self-obliterated Buddhist.”

“They are one. The more I love myself, the more I love you.”

“But what do you mean by, ‘If I worship one thing more than another it shall be the spread of my own body, translucent mould of me’? Now, that’s belated Greek.”

“It’s nothing old. It’s new and democratic.”

Gard grumbled feebly.

“It sounds queer enough for a gospel. It won’t do for me now. I shall have to fat up to it.”

The gray man leaned forward with that tremulous, dewy look in his eyes. He seemed to have an immense capacity of feeling, a physique made large to endure it.

“You didn’t love yourself enough. All that wasn’t love. You didn’t love any one. Love inward, love outward, love everywhere, love some one most, love many much. All empty without that, a drifting boat without anchor. You look for the boatman. No one there. Drowned? No. Never was there.”

After a long silence—“Say that ‘Cradle’ thing again. It’s a man’s soul in the body of a whale. I don’t believe it’s new and demo-

“The Debatable Land”

cratic. It must be old and human. But I know what you mean.”

So February and March were gone. Maverick said there was a big fight coming, went away, and came no more; nor the gray man, either, who was absorbed in his hospitals and his “average young man,” and grown hollow-eyed with watchings and strenuous sympathy. Everything gone, nothing coming except spring and letters from Hagar; nothing staying except Gard himself and Sabrina, who reminded one of melting butter, but of whom the quantity grew no less. “Hagar! Hagar!” the high fluting voice seemed now to call continually, till the tension of his longing, Gard fancied, would pull Hagar to him if he did not go soon.

Late in April they packed him into a night train, and all night, or whenever he awoke and looked out, the earth seemed to be running away southward, as if sucked towards the whirlpool of the war, but the stars to be traveling northward with him. How impatient they were! How they snapped and danced and quivered! “Hurry, hurry! But you will see how we will shine over Hagar and forget the bleak laws of our journeyings, and be night-lamps in Helen’s garden.”

“The Debatable Land”

In the morning the train stood still in the terminal. He had some hours to wait. He crept through the station. The rattle and roar of the city met him at the door. The few returning soldiers like himself were lost in pursuing crowds, the only signs here of the war that to southward had seemed branded on the soil and written across the street fronts. A policeman caught sight of his uniform, and added some points to his rank, out of benevolence.

“What ’ll you have, colonel?”

“I think I’ll have a cab.”

The hurrying crowd paused, and cheered huskily when he drove away. He had the cabman drive across town and down the old avenue. At the church of the Holy Trinity there was a morning service beginning, and he climbed the steps. Within, a few hundred people were scattered about. The only sound was the moaning of the organ. High up at one side he could see Moselle’s hunched shoulders and dingy yellow head, faded with age, against the blue and gilded pipes. Moselle began to play a prelude, something stately and stern, like the thousand-century-old front of a gray crag, that might be well known but never could

“The Debatable Land”

be familiar. The dingy old head moved Gard more than the prelude. He went back to the cab and drove down towards the Brotherhood. There was no flowing river so strange as the flowing river of the street. Every one was isolated, no doubt; but, after all, there was a bond. It ought to be celebrated and sworn to. A truckman on top of a dray looked down and probably caught him smiling to himself, grinned, and shouted, “How goes it?” Here and there on the sidewalk, too, men called out to him. Every door and window here between Trinity and the Brotherhood was familiar, and the brick walls and shuttered windows of the Brotherhood were eloquent. He thought, “I’ll go in another time, and see Francis and his sick flower-bed, and the school and Andrew. It would scare me into a relapse to see the Superior now. Nobody but the *bonus Deus* ever understood him, and the *bonus Deus* is in Hagar.”

So he went back to the station. The train ran for an hour or more past glimpses of the sea, and then turned up the Wyantenaug Valley. At Hamilton he changed cars. The brave old river sweeps around a curve, and

“The Debatable Land”

Hamilton lies in the curve. He could see the tower of the grand-stand in the Fair grounds, and Saint Mary's among the other steeples, but he sat still on the station platform, saw his trunk go by on a hand-truck, and watched beyond the freight-yards the rippling, glinting river, hurrying, busy, with its myriad little shining points of happiness. Was it the languor of his weariness or a magic in the river that flowed down from that promised land of Beulah, the mythical Hagar, the mother of the homeless—a Mecca, a Bethlehem, an Arden of wise flowers and musical brooks? The river seemed to gesture, and mutter syllables and sentences. Some one spoke loudly over his head. He looked up and saw Morgan Map.

“Going up the valley? So am I,” Morgan said, and Gard nodded languidly. It occurred to him, slowly, that he ought to be surprised. “The train's ready. Come along.”

A practical man, this Map, Gard thought—a very genius of accomplishment. Why should he go into Beulah, too? Why not? But he must be doing something here, this forcible schemer, who did nothing unaccountably. If he meditated violence, it was a poor place for

“The Debatable Land”

it. Much better to have set fire to the house near the hospital, or corrupted Sabrina and poisoned the breakfast. Still—Gard pulled himself slowly up the car steps. His knees had not yet recovered from their wavering inadequacy—still, it was what Maving would have called “a sportsmanlike situation.” Map might try some simple, antique, and desperate thing. In that case it would be well to get one’s gun where it could be pulled suddenly. Gunpowder was the handicap that made an invalid even with two hundred pounds and six-feet-two of red-haired, aggressive health. And all that was nonsense. What a sinewy force it was—this love of a woman!—that suddenly snapped a man’s habits apart, dragged all his other motives indifferently after it; one of the universal energies. Joy and desperation, and the beast and the climbing soul, seemed packed in it more closely side by side than in any other experience.

Two or three men were in the car at one end. Morgan went to the other end and pulled over a seat. The two sat down facing each other, and Morgan produced cigars.

“I’m glad you brought these, however you happen to be here,” said Gard. “The doctor

“The Debatable Land”

forbids them, so I don't carry any, but accept them from fate. It's a fine point of casuistry. I disliked that doctor—I disliked his whiskers, mostly. They used to get twisted up in my feverish nightmares. *Did* you happen to be here?”

“No. I found out what time you were going, got leave of absence and came along.”

“To see where I was going? I don't know that I understand why.”

“Oh, partly. I had a general plan. I'll explain. I'm a practical man,” he went on, quietly, after a moment. “I don't believe in loading up with the past. No scruples and no malice. What's no use to remember I forget. They're all dead weight. I cut loose. That's the way I'm made. Now, I don't know how you're made—don't know what kind you are.”

“Neither do I. I'm going up to Hagar to find out.”

“Well! I said; I'm done, hedged out; hedged in, too. The question is, Can I cut out—cut loose? It depends on Windham. The more I thought about it the more I didn't get any definition of you. I concluded to come along—see what could be done—clear up the ground—know what's to pay. If you go to Hagar with

“The Debatable Land”

the purpose supposed, that's all right. I'm done, anyway. I have an errand of my own there—which doesn't concern you, however. I throw up my hand. I was in hell and played for keeps. I say now, a man that's won needn't bear malice. No use in that. He can call me what he chooses if it eases his mind. That won't hurt me any, nor him. He's safe. He needn't be dainty. It's a fact. I sent a tracer after you up the Shenandoah. God knows why it missed, I don't. I could have sworn there was daylight through Jack Mavering's head. Missed again. He walked in on me in Mrs. Mavering's sitting-room and made me feel like a wet hen. I put my head in my pocket and walked out. What else could I do? You're going to Hagar. All right, I'll show you where to go. What more can I do? I'm telling you all this now from policy.”

“And I'm calling no names,” Gard remarked. “Mavering professes to have a great admiration for you as a practical practitioner. You're probably right to come along.”

“Oh, I figure pretty well. I was a fool—but still, that thing was figured pretty well. I'd have won out finally all right if—”

“I object to what you have in mind to say—

“The Debatable Land”

prefer to think you wouldn't 'have won out finally, if—' Better not speculate. We'il call that a stipulation.”

Map lifted his brows and settled himself more comfortably. A change, an expression of relief, slipped over his big, harsh-boned face, the only sign of the tension that he had been under.

“Stipulations—that's what I want. If there's anything to be done to restore amiability, good God! it's surely my part to do it.”

Gard looked out of the window and was silent.

Green meadows and brown fallows moving past, white houses under aged maples, hills of climbing pasture lands and pale-green forests. Did men carry any sullen burdens in this valley? Better drop them and go unburdened into Hagar.

“I suppose there might be a sort of public duty involved,” he said, “which interests me just now about to the extent of an empty medicine bottle. I flung the last one at Mrs. Maver-ing's black cook. You remember Sabrina? You couldn't even break glass on her. Do you think of taking up regularly with—I beg your pardon—with a criminal career?”

“The Debatable Land”

“Criminal! A criminal’s a fool. I’m no fool, or never was before. I lost my head. That’s only once. Criminal! Why, look here! What do you make out of this world you and I have been shovelling dirt in now some years? Isn’t every man in it for himself and against his neighbor, if his neighbor’s in his way—which he partly is, always? Do people go into society to amuse themselves or each other? Themselves, of course. And business is competition, and competition’s private war according to rules of custom. I’m supposed to be a lawyer. That’s a succession of jobs at beating somebody else and getting paid for it. This civil war is one collection of private interests against another collection. The South was getting beaten in business—held a losing hand—wanted to break up the game. That meant a fight. Take you and me. You wouldn’t let me out of this if you saw anything more in it. You don’t see anything more in it. I don’t, either. I’d do exactly the same, for the same reason. Never shove a man farther than you need to make your point. I don’t compete with you any more in anything. I keep out of your way and avoid offence. For the rest, I compete. The law is an artificial

“The Debatable Land”

line. The line is moved now and then. At one time it's criminal to lend money at interest and innocent to fight a duel. Another, it's the other way. That's all right. But a man's a fool not to fight inside the line as it happens to stand. There's room enough.”

Gard thought he saw some of his own philosophies in caricature. They looked unlovely enough in caricature. Map was an interesting man. If peculiar, it was rather that his mind was so sharp-edged, unqualifying, absolute. It refused to see shades. It saw hard outlines and felt the impact of surfaces. Gard thought that at one time he would have found him still more interesting and would not have felt this repulsion from him. Probably convalescence was a fastidious state. He turned away to the window. There was a domed mountain in sight, its spurs thrust forward into the valley, sides covered partly with a young-leaved forest, partly with pine and hemlock, and its bald, rocky head bare in the sunlight. The train stopped at a little station by the river. The old, battered stage rolled them away slumberously over an echoing covered bridge, across the valley bottom lands, where the zigzag fences and the calling of the

“The Debatable Land”

ploughman to his team, the bluebird on the zig-zag fence, and the slim white birches along the mountain spurs all seemed in the same concord with the ancient earth and child-like sky. The silent, misanthropic stage-driver looked the kin of the country-side's slow vegetation.

The road swung around the mountain and went up through a dim green avenue of pines and hemlocks, and below, in its bowldered crypts and gorges, poured a stream with white foam and mysterious song, or sometimes lay still in black pools. The steep slope of the mountain was on the left. The road climbed steadily, and came out of the woods at last not a mile from the village in a cup of the hills of Hagar.

At the cross-roads Morgan stepped out and Gard followed.

“The house is behind the church there,” Morgan said, shortly, and moved to walk away, but stopped and turned half around when Gard spoke, listening with his mouth set and yellow brows drawn low.

“I dare say you'll succeed, you and your philosophy,” said Gard, slowly, looking towards the church and the house behind it. “I dare

“The Debatable Land”

say I sha’n’t, in that way—or care to, very much. Competition doesn’t seem to me worth while.”

Morgan was silent. The battered stage had rolled away down the hill to the post-office, where Mr. Paulus came out for the mail, and Thaddeus Bourn followed after him. Thaddeus looked up the hill, dropped the iron point of his cane on the stone step with a click, and stared blankly. Mr. Paulus, mail-bag in hand, stopped and followed the direction of Thaddeus’s eyes. The stage-driver climbed down from his seat and joined them.

“I don’t care,” Gard continued, “a blank cartridge what you did or tried to do. There’s no stipulation except that we keep out of each other’s way. Is that satisfactory?”

“That’s all right.” Morgan hesitated, and brought out with apparent effort: “You’d better look in the cemetery first; I saw something there,” went his way with long strides, and disappeared down the first dip on the Cattle Ridge road.

“There’s a cemetery, very true,” Gard thought, and went towards it, past the minister’s picket fence and neat gate to where the mournful hemlocks stood in meditation. And

“The Debatable Land”

there some one in a black dress was kneeling and planting flowers over a new grave, and near by was a tall, gray stone, and thereon, graven in large letters:

“SIMON BOURN,

“BORN ————— DIED —————

“REMEMBER ME.”

Morgan swung along, and looked not to right or left, nor cared if any villager speculated on the singular sight of “one of the Map boys” observably bound for the square house on the hill; past the mill where Job Mather watched his slow millstones, past the mill-pond, the blacksmith’s, and the rambling, low farm-house that hived innumerable Durfeys, through the stone pillars of Squire Map’s gate, up to the square house on the hill.

The door was locked. He rang the bell, and waited some time. The place seemed half deserted, unkept, the walks littered with last year’s rotting leaves.

The door opened suddenly and Squire Map nearly filled it with broad, bowed shoulders.

“I’ve lost her, dad.”

“Come in, Morgan.”

“The Debatable Land”

The latter followed into the dining-room and they sat down. Opposite him on the wall was the portrait of his mother in her bridal-dress. A stately lady always, somewhat cold. She seemed to wear her bridal-veil as a kind of drapery for her pride. Morgan spread his large hands on the table and looked at them.

“I played like hell for it.”

“No doubt. Go on.”

He told his story coolly and without omission.

“I suppose you are a worse man than your brother,” said the squire at last. “He is more scrupulous. I liked you better. You have more candor, carry more weight. I have not been a scrupulous man.”

Morgan was looking at the portrait.

“What did you want me to lose for? You won.”

“Won! No, I lost. So will you, soon or late. Better soon than late.” He followed Morgan’s eyes. “Your mother—I’d as lief she’d have died twenty years earlier.”

“This sort of thing is futile, dad. Why don’t you come out of your shell? Come and get into the push again.”

“What for? From my standpoint and my age, Morgan, ask yourself—What for?”

“The Debatable Land”

Morgan laughed, lifted his fists, and let them fall with a crash on the table.

“I’m young yet.”

“Oh, there’s a great deal in that. But one draws no interest from time. You live on your capital. But there’s much in being at the beginning instead of at the end—a great deal in that.”

Chapter XXIII

The End

"IT is this way," said Thaddeus, "to speak from a — a — personal standpoint. If Morgan Map goes to the cemetery I shall not wait for my mail, but go and — a — accidentally interrupt. If he goes north, the other man may go there, if he chooses. I shall wait for my mail."

"Your standpoint!" said Mr. Paulus, heavily. "Well—speakin' from young Map's, what might he want in the cemetery? Speakin' from mine, I'd rather he'd go there and stay."

"My niece Helen is at present planting flowers in the cemetery—in point of fact, roots."

Mr. Paulus was aroused. "They might do some buttin'—think?"

"Gals! Shucks!" The stage-driver climbed back to his seat and drove away. Mr. Paulus looked after him, musingly.

"Willard Sickles," he said, "never would have nothin' to do with women. He was born drivin' mails!"

“The Debatable Land”

“Pun?” asked Thaddeus, delicately, with his eyes on the Four Corners. “Pun, Peter?”

“Hey?” Mr. Paulus was still thoughtful—abstracted. “Lonesome and disgusted. Born so. It’s his nature.”

The two at the Four Corners separated. Morgan went north, Gard towards the cemetery.

“I thought they might do some buttin’,” said Mr. Paulus, as one grown used to disappointment, and went in with his mailbags.

Sundry villagers appeared, drifting slowly to the focus of the post-office. Thaddeus took off his glasses and put them with precision into their case.

“I wonder if Pete intended a pun? Probably not. Conversation is subject to accidents. It is a pity that conversation is not—not more secure.”

Gard entered the cemetery-gate and went along the shrub-bordered path.

“Every man is the dungeon of himself, but there is a key that unlocks mine.”

He stepped from the path into the grass, and Helen’s apron was full of a mess of brown, earthy roots. She started and cried out, and

“The Debatable Land”

held up both hands to him, with the trowel in one of them.

“I don’t like my life, Nellie. Won’t you let me into yours?” And she dropped the trowel and said, “Oh—why, yes,” in a tone that sounded like an after-climax, and Gard took apron, yellow head, and all into his arms, and scattered the roots beside Widow Bourn’s placid grave and Simon’s stone, on which was graven insistently, “Remember Me.” A blue-bird warbled and cooed to himself on the fence and paid no attention. The bold head of Windless Mountain glimmered in the sun, that swung low and near it. Presently the shadow of Windless would sweep over Hagar with noiseless rush, with silence, or the sleepy twittering of day-birds.

“It was a long way here, Nellie. I went nearly to the other end of everything to find the path.”

“Do you really love me? How long?”

“Long before I knew it. Do you mean how long am I going to?”

“No, I don’t. Look, Gard! These will be blue violets when they grow. They come from behind the church, and mother liked them. But you belong to me now, and you mustn’t

“The Debatable Land”

stay here. It's cold under the hemlocks. You must come out in the sun.”

They went back along the path to the gate. Over the fence in his garden the minister was planting peas, arranging them according to some theory of fitness, perhaps allegorically, and humming a hymn out of tune. Knowing that a tune was a spiritual mystery which Providence did not permit him ever thoroughly to penetrate, he only sang when he thought himself alone, and in a subdued murmur. The weather-vane of the militant church pointed southwest at Windless Mountain, which meant always a benevolent opinion about the weather. The sun slipped behind the mountain, and the shadow of Windless flowed over Hagar; over Rachel standing at the lilac gate, waiting for Helen, and liking the impersonal peace of the hour; over Thaddeus stepping up the hill from the post-office, and formulating certain reflections on the use and abuse of accident in the practice of conversation; over Helen and Gard.

“You must learn all about Hagar, Gard. That's the minister. He always pats his peas on the head when he plants them. And that's Windless.”

“The Debatable Land”

“Is that Windless? He looks like a gentleman. Let’s call the minister and let him pat us on the head, show him it’s a world of kisses so he’ll know what the trouble is, and tell him to ring the bell to-morrow.”

“Nonsense. Besides, if you’re going to do that, I’d rather only Windless saw.”

“You’ll be famous and glorious, won’t you? And I’ll be proud—”

“Proud in a tower?”

“Oh, anywhere. Properly proud like Windless. But we’ll like best to be in Hagar, because that will be home.”

“I’ll be something, or try to be, if you want it. I’m a tired soldier now, Nellie, on sick leave. I told the adjutant I was in love, too, but he wouldn’t put it in the permit. Let’s go home.”

They went up past the militant church, and Thaddeus and Rachel waited, smiling, at the gate under the lilacs. Simon’s epitaph and the fading mountain were left facing each other across the dusk. In any issue between them, the dignity of law and time seemed to be with the mountain as against the personal claim, yet one did not come to Hagar to learn among its twilights that humanity was de-

“The Debatable Land”

generate nature, or that the instinct of its insistent identity was lawless; it might be an amendment in the process of making.

“They’re coming,” said Thaddeus. “The older I grow, Mrs. Mavering, the more I perceive a certain dexterity in the—in fact, in event; a shell now, for instance, skilfully exploded.”

Rachel only smiled and threw open the gate.

I heard a pilgrim near a temple gate
Crying, “I have no fear if thou art Fate;

Morn, eve, and noon, if I look up to thee,
Wilt thou at night look down, remembering me?

Nay, then, my sins so great, my service small”—
So prayed he at the gate—“forget them all;

Of claims and rights a load the while I keep,
How in thy nights, O God, to smile and sleep?”

“Pilgrim,” I said, “hath He, who toils the while,
Bade thee, of burdens free, now sleep and smile?”

Who built the hills on high and laid the sea,
Set in thy heart that cry, ‘Remember me.’”

From *Persian Moralities*.

American Contemporary Novels

LET NOT MAN
PUT ASUNDER

BY BASIL KING

This is the tenth of the twelve One-a-Month American Novels to be published during 1901.

"The new volume in the American Novel Series, which will, we doubt not, more than justify that undertaking in the eyes of American readers. Mr. King has a firm grasp of character; . . . he handles dialogue with epigrammatic felicity, and he has something to say. . . . Mr. King's study of his heroine is an admirable performance. . . . A novel worthy of the notice of all thinking and observing Americans. Its qualities as a story are deepened by its meaning as a study of temperament and changing social conditions."—Richard Henry Stoddard in *New York Mail and Express*.

"'Let Not Man Put Asunder' is clever, spicy, absorbing, and thought-inspiring—a book with many missions. . . . A novel in which the problems of unhappy marriage and separation are very seriously and comprehensively considered."—*New York World*.

"The story moves through unusually brilliant dialogue and a series of exciting scenes to its swift and inevitable conclusion."—*Public Opinion*, New York.

"A book that fairly throbs with intense interest from start to finish. . . . Its characters are living portraiture. It is thoroughly sane and sound."—*Philadelphia Item*.

Comments from various reviewers :

"Masterfully handled."

"A most powerful drama of life."

"As timely as it is well done."

"A book to be respected."

"Mr. King is a 'coming' man."

Post 8vo.

Cloth, Ornamented, \$1.50

HARPER & BROTHERS, PUBLISHERS

American Contemporary Novels

EASTOVER COURT HOUSE

By HENRY BURNHAM BOONE
and KENNETH BROWN

*This is the first of the twelve One-a-Month American Novels
to be published during 1901.*

"If each of the novels of American life by American authors which Messrs. Harper & Brothers project for the current year proves as good as 'Eastover Court House,' the twelve volumes will constitute a decided addition to American fiction."—*Detroit Free Press*.

"Its charm lies in the constant succession of strongly drawn pictures of life. One chapter after another presents these scenes, as sharply outlined and deep in shadows as an artistic photograph. The book . . . is absolutely fascinating."—*Louisville Courier-Journal*.

"Set in the midst of the fox-hunting and cross-country regions, there is the hoof-beat of the galloping hunter all through the story, which is full of dry humor and vivid pen-pictures of life."—*Horse Show Monthly*.

"The horse stories are the best since David Harum's, and quite as laughable as his."—*Chester Times*.

Comments from various reviewers

"A good story well told."

"Strong and absorbing."

"Warm with life, with the passions and emotions . . .
of Virginia."

"Wholesome, true to life."

Post 8vo.

Cloth, Ornamented, \$1.50

HARPER & BROTHERS, PUBLISHERS

American Contemporary Novels

THE SENTIMENTALISTS

By ARTHUR STANWOOD PIER

This is the second of the twelve One-a-Month American Novels to be published during 1901.

"A novelist who sets out to depict a character like Becky Sharp is likely to come to grief. Hence it is surprising that Mr. Pier has not failed in portraying the social exile, Mrs. Kent. The novel is strong and clever."—*Pittsburg Commercial-Gazette*.

"It is a very clever novel. There is 'story' to it; there is apt phrasing and clear delineation of character; there is much incisive and delightful epigram."—*Evening Sun*, New York.

"If the cleverest parts of this work had been entirely cut out, we should have called it one of the cleverest novels of the season."—*Brooklyn Daily Eagle*.

"The book is characterized throughout by keen analysis and a delightful sense of humor."—*Chicago Tribune*.

Comments from various reviewers

"Mrs. Kent is distinctly American."

"As interesting and unique as Becky Sharp."

"The book will be a success."

"A rattling good story."

"A vivid study of contemporary social life."

"One of the cleverest novels of the season."

Post 800.

Cloth, Ornamented, \$1.50

HARPER & BROTHERS, PUBLISHERS

American Contemporary Novels

MARTIN BROOK

By MORGAN BATES

This is the third of the twelve One-a-Month American Novels to be published during 1901.

"It is written in a style unknown nowadays, . . . with an impressive power revealed at each crisis of the tale, which makes the pulses stir and the eye glisten. What a book for the opening of the twentieth century!"—Julian Hawthorne, in the *Journal*, New York.

"A very striking book, and one that I am quite sure will take an enviable place in line with record-breakers. It is the third of the 'American Novel Series,' and is entitled 'Martin Brook.' I finished it at one sitting, so intense was my interest in it."—*Buffalo Commercial*, N. Y.

"The third of the 'American Novel Series,' 'Martin Brook,' by Morgan Bates, appeals to the best in man and woman, and is a credit alike to author and publishers. . . . 'Martin Brook' is indeed an American novel, and of the best kind."—*Philadelphia Daily Evening Telegraph*.

"One's interest is caught and held by the hero from the moment of his first appearance in its pages. . . . There has not been a stronger scene [the library scene] written to revive the interest of jaded novel readers for many a day."
—*N. Y. Commercial Advertiser*.

"The story is told in a vigorous manner, and is certainly out of the common run of fiction as it is told nowadays."
—*New York Sun*.

Comments from various reviewers :

"One of the most refreshing and natural of novels."

"As good as it is charming."

"A story of depth, color, and action."

"It is refreshing to light upon a story like 'Martin Brook.'"

Post 8vo.

Cloth, Ornamented, \$1.50

HARPER & BROTHERS, PUBLISHERS

American Contemporary Novels

A VICTIM OF CIRCUMSTANCES

By GERALDINE ANTHONY

*This is the fourth of the twelve One-a-Month American Novels
to be published during 1901.*

"It plunges the reader directly into the social whirl of New York, and the hand that detains one there all through an intensely interesting succession of functions, flirtations, and incidents, . . . is the hand of one who has seen something whereof she writes."—*New York World*.

"There is more than one thinly disguised portrait in its pages—so we are told."—*Mail and Express*, New York.

"Bobby Floyd is probably the most disagreeable and wholly exasperating cad ever put into an American novel. . . . There is love-making all through the book."—*The Times*, Washington, D. C.

"They fall in love amid most delightful surroundings of tennis, boating, and driving."—*Exchange*.

Comments from various reviewers :

"Devoid of problems or mental complications."

"A book for a summer day."

"Has the correct New York social atmosphere."

"Decidedly a fascinating book about attractive people."

"Full of touch-and-go conversation."

"They all revel in smart talk and repartee."

Post 8vo

Cloth, Ornamented, \$1.50

HARPER & BROTHERS, PUBLISHERS

American Contemporary Novels

DAYS LIKE THESE

By EDWARD W. TOWNSEND

This is the fifth of the twelve One-a-Month American Novels to be published during 1901.

"Mr. Townsend has given us a novel that is a strong and vigorous picture of contemporary New York. He tells his story with the gayety and charm and light-hearted high spirits of one to whom the passing show of life is still full of interest, and he succeeds in interesting the reader. There is not a dull line in the book."—*New York Journal*.

"The love story is well told, but the chief interest of the novel lies in its contrasted pictures of New York life—from Fifth Avenue to Hell's Kitchen."—*Cleveland Plain-Dealer*.

"Mr. Townsend has made a very striking and daring use of his experience as a newspaper man. . . . He has gone about his business with vigor and decision. . . . There is hardly a chapter which does not stand out through sheer force of the author's fund of anecdote and observation and humor."—*New York Commercial Advertiser*.

"It is an eminent success. . . . We recall very few novels of the past year that we have read with such sustained interest"—*The Churchman*, New York.

Comments from various reviewers :

"The book has countless good things.

"'Days Like These' is full of life and New York."

"A kaleidoscopic yet homogeneous picture of modern New York life."

"His pictures are vivid and true."

"Mr. Townsend writes incisively, vigorously."

Post 8vo.

Cloth, Ornamented, \$1.50

HARPER & BROTHERS, PUBLISHERS

American Contemporary Novels

WESTERFELT

By WILL N. HARBEN

This is the sixth of the twelve One-a-Month American Novels to be published during 1901.

"A good, ingenious story, which grows more and more interesting as the author proceeds."—Richard Henry Stoddard.

"It is a highly dramatic presentation of the warring forces of human passions, conscience, and distorted religious beliefs. The story from first page to last is vibrant with sustained power."—*The Outlook*, N. Y.

"I have only words of praise to write of 'Westerfelt.' It is an uncommonly good story, wherein is presented a very interesting picture of American life as known in the author's native state."—*Boston Times*.

"Mr. Harben has lived among North Georgia people; he has learned their ways and their life; and, learning this, he has woven these people and their life into a story full of charm and truth. It has the best claim on the attention of the public—it is thoroughly readable."—*Atlanta Journal*.

Comments from various reviewers :

"A love story, pure and simple."

"Unusual and unhackneyed."

"Full of dramatic elements."

"One of the best novels."

"Strong throughout."

Post 8vo.

Cloth, Ornamented, \$1.50

HARPER & BROTHERS, PUBLISHERS



**THIS BOOK IS DUE ON THE LAST DATE
STAMPED BELOW**

AN INITIAL FINE OF 25 CENTS

**WILL BE ASSESSED FOR FAILURE TO RETURN
THIS BOOK ON THE DATE DUE. THE PENALTY
WILL INCREASE TO 50 CENTS ON THE FOURTH
DAY AND TO \$1.00 ON THE SEVENTH DAY
OVERDUE.**

MAR 31 1935

606665

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY

